principles of Salvation

A treatise on spiritual wayfaring

Allamah Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Husayni
Tihrani

Introduction and edition
Sayyid Muhammad Muhsin Husayni Tihrani

Translation
Abdulrahman Cherri

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TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC AND PERSIAN

CONSONANTS A = Arabic, P = Persian

	A	P		A	P		A	P
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ز	z	z	ك	k	
ب	b	b	ژ	__	zh	گ	__	g
پ	__	p	س	s	s	ل	l	L
ت	t	t	ش	sh	sh	م	m	m
ث	th	s̱	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ن	n	n
ج	j	j	ض	ḍ	ż	ه	h	h
چ	__	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	و	w	w
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ي	y	v *or* u
خ	kh	kh	ع	ʿ	ʿ	ة	a	__
د	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ال	al	__
ذ	dh	z̲	ف	f	f			
ر	r	r	ق	q	q			

VOWELS ARABIC AND PERSIAN

Long ا or	ى	ā
	و	ū
	ي	ī
Doubled	يّ	iyy
	وّ	uww
Diphthongs	وَ	au *or* aw
	ىَ	ai *or* ay
Short	ـَ	a
	ـُ	u
	ـِ	i

Table of Contents

TRANSLITERATION SYSTEM FOR ARABIC AND PERSIAN 2

Table of Contents

Introduction

Chapter 1 The Purpose in God's Creation of Man

The incumbency of spiritual wayfaring upon everyone 15

The first steps following one's awakening 18

1. Discovering who we are 18

2. Knowing our path and goal and their value 20

The outcome of spiritual wayfaring 22

1. Arrival 22

2. The removal of inner darkness and rancor 22

The world is the abode of movement 27

A number of hindrances to one's movement 30

The outcome of our journey will be revealed when we reach the destination 32

The great efforts to which the prophets and imams went to reveal the truth to us 33

The Battle of Badr 34

Some pretexts which lead to straying from the path 38

A number of necessities for wayfaring on this path 39

The movement must be done by choice 39

It is necessary to keep vigil at night 39

Acting in accordance with one's duty 40

Chapter 2 To See Nothing but God

The conditions of spiritual wayfaring 52

1) High ambition 53

A wayfarer must act solely for God 55

The story of Sayyid al-Qāḍī with Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm 62

2) Perseverance, patience, and tolerance on the path of wayfaring towards God 70

The obstacles on the path of spiritual wayfaring 70

How to overcome obstacles on the path 75

Chapter 3 The Necessity of Concealing Divine Secrets

The levels of concealment of secrets 88

The vilest consequence of exposing a secret is *ʾistidrāj* 91

The negative consequences of revealing secrets 94

1. Shutting the door in the face of others 94
2. Being afflicted with self-conceit (*ʿujub*) 96
3. Failure to reach the goal 101
4. What is to be concealed 103

The role of the prophets and imams is to elevate people spiritually 112

Chapter 4 The Necessity of Submitting Oneself to a Master

Obedience is surrender to God's Will 118

The meaning of obedience 121

The importance and necessity of obedience 121

The necessity of referring to experts in both worldly and spiritual matters 124

Some benefits of the instructions of a master 125

1) A master's instructions make acts of worship more effective 125

2) The spiritual instructor teaches the wayfarer how to remove spiritual veils. 132

An example of how the Prophet [p] and Imams [p] treated others 135

The outcome of obedience 139
The outcome of forgoing obedience 145
Chapter 5 A Number of Important Fundamentals in Spiritual Wayfaring 150
1. Silence 150
The relationship between speech and the heart 152
Silence requires training and practice 153
Sayyid al-Qāḍī's exposition on the effect of speech on the heart 154
God's manifestations only occur when the self is tranquil 156
The levels of silence 157
Silence comprises both speaking and listening 158
Examples of excessive and non-excessive speech 160
2. Health and nutrition 162
3. Seclusion 164
The people of the world draw the human being towards the world 167
How to select a friend and associate 167
The meaning of seclusion 168
Associating with the righteous (*ṣulaḥā*) and friends of God (*'awliyā' 'Allā*) is important for the wayfarer 169
4. Morning wakefulness (*saḥar*) 171
5. The constant remembrance of God 171
The meaning of continuous remembrance (*dhikr*) and its importance 173
The story of the lumberjack who requested pure love from God 174

One must progress gradually in spiritual wayfaring 175
The importance of remembrance in spiritual wayfaring 176
An important principle in *sulūk*: moderation 179
Chapter 6 Constant attention (*Murāqaba*), Purification (*Tazikiya*), and Persistence (*Muwāẓaba*)
The reality of spiritual wayfaring 187
Shaykh Behjat and silence 189
Silence is one the essential guidelines for this path 191
The main condition for the effectiveness of actions 193
The importance of *murāqaba* 195
The importance of the *riwāya* of *ʿUnwān al-Baṣrī* in spiritual wayfaring 201
Loss is the consequence of failing to act 202
The necessity of seclusion and isolation 205
The necessity of being cautious 206
How to visit the shrines of the infallible Imams [p] and the holy sanctuaries 208
The actions of the wayfarer must be wayfaring 209
A wayfarer must not consider what they do for their friends in God 210
The first instruction of God's saints to their students is *ṣalāt ʾal-layl* 211
The necessity of visiting the graves of God's saints and seeking the saints' intercession 213
References
Index of Quranic Verses
Index of Aḥādīth

هو العليم

بسم اللّـهِ الرّحمـٰن الرّحيم

In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate.

Introduction

All thanks belong exclusively to the Essence of the Living (*al-Ḥayy*), the Affectionate (*al-Wadūd*), Who made the perfection of knowing His Essence the goal of creating mankind, and Who legislated principles and rulings founded upon this goal. Eternal blessings be upon Muhammad, the Chosen One, and his pure progeny, the flagbearers of this sect and path, and the leaders who take others toward the sacred valley of detachment from the material world (*tajarrud*) to the Mount of Sinai of gnosis (*ma'rifa*). Blessings be upon His friends (*awliyā'*) and the confidents of His threshold who have always remained a torch illuminating the Truth and divine gnosis through their continuous practice of the enlightening teachings of the revelation (*waḥy*). They brought forth these teachings, remained focused upon them, and assumed the responsibility of

taking the hands of God's servants and guiding them away from their ignorance and darkness. They endured the burden of the message of *tawḥīd* in the face of the rejectors, obstinate individuals, and human and jinn satans, while seeking nothing other than God's pleasure.

From the time of the movement of humankind from the realm of attachments (*taʿalluqāt*), the whispers of the self (*wasāwis ʾal-nafs*) and the dominance of delusive imaginations (*awhām*) and fancies (*takhayyulāt*) towards the realm of light (*nūr*), splendor (*bahā*), and unity is not possible except through self-discipline and purification, God Almighty sent messengers and revealed scriptures for the children of Adam. Otherwise, how would it be possible for a human being, immersed in [worldly] desires and multiplicities, in darkness, ignorance, and confusion, to move from this dwelling to the palace of light and splendor which stands in opposition to their state and whims? Furthermore, how would it be possible for one to withdraw oneself, using their unstable thoughts, imperfect reason/intellect, and ill heart, from the entrapments of darkness and delusion? Nay! It is not possible.

When taking all these factors into consideration, the intellect will determine that obeying and following their commands and guidelines does not conflict, in any form, with

one's liberty and freedom of choice, nor does it interfere with one's life and path decisions. Moreover, when an individual considers their human condition, the future which awaits them, their inadequate intellect and incapability of discerning the truth, reality, and what is in their own best interests, the individual will take the initiative and undertake this grave and important matter which the performing or neglecting of will determine their eternal happiness or sadness.

Based on the aforementioned, we can most certainly say that the path of *ʿirfān* and divine gnosis not only secures the absolute right and freedom of choice for one who follows and practices it, but that from amongst all the conceivable paths of human spiritual progression and elevation, it is what brings forth the most tranquility, peace, and joy.

It is the path that is devoid of cursing, abuse, insult, humiliation, constriction, pressure, hypocrisy, duplicity, covering up and making excuses, and spying. Moreover, it is a path which does not take people by force or overwork them. It is devoid of darkness and anything which conflicts with reason (*ʿaql*), logic (*mantiq*), and customs (*ʿurf*). Furthermore, it does not involve any stripping away of one's liberty or freedom of choice. All wayfarers and followers of this path continue their movement

and journey with peace of mind, with willingness, and with a tranquil heart.

The divine mystics devised a great and beautiful plan and guidelines for mankind. They explained the necessities and requirements of this movement through the exposition and elucidation of the experienced traditions which they discovered and are extant in their words and books. They also clarified the difference between the path and the pitfalls, the correct path and wrong one, between light and darkness, clear-sightedness and ignorance, and truth and falsehood. They clarified all these matters and identified them for those who seek them. They mentioned in their books, articles, and letters the nuances of life and the places to which the travelers towards God must pay special heed.

We are capable of discovering the necessities of spiritual wayfaring towards God as well as what is required on this path from the subjects and works, we have received from the divine saints and spiritual mentors. We are also capable of benefiting from these in sensitive and life-related situations. They function as keys with which one can open up and resolve one's confusion and doubts.

The late ʿAllāma, Grand Ayatollah, and perfect gnostic (*ʿārif wāṣil)*, Hajj Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī (may God

be pleased with him) is a unique divine saints and servants of God. He first traversed the stations of wayfaring under the tutelage of the grandest of teachers and the mystic who attained perfection, his eminence ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī (May God sanctify his noble soul) and then under the *ʿārif billā wa bi ʾamrillā*, Hajj Shaykh Muḥammad Jawād ʾAnṣārī Hamadānī (May God sanctify his soul). He applied himself zealously to the sacred and divine sanctuary of *ʾInsān ʾal-ʿAyn* and *ʿAyn ʾal-ʾInsān*, the venerable Hajj Sayyid Hāshim ʾal-Ḥaddād (May my soul be his ransom), and thus he reached the sought station, and arrived at the sanctuary of the Worshipped One (*ʾal-Maʿbūd*).

The late ʿAllāma Ṭihrānī repeatedly said, *"When I arrived at the presence of Sayyid ʾal-Ḥaddād, I found my lost self, and I found with him all my requests, aspirations, and wishes."*

The peculiar qualities which belong to the late ʿAllāma Ṭihrānī, such as his vast knowledge in varying sciences including, amongst others, jurisprudence, exegesis, philosophy, and theoretical mysticism, allow us to demonstrate that he surpassed (*ʾaʿlamiyya*) all his peers in the sphere of *marjaʿiyya*

and *fatwā*. For this reason, it is the belief of this humble being that no one was his equal during his lifetime. As for his movement in the journeying towards proximity to the Truth and spiritual wayfaring, he was the exclusive and unique student of his teacher. He is the instantiation (*miṣdāq*) of what I heard from the late ʾal-Ḥaddād (may God be pleased with him) when he said, *"I gave your father, Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn, everything I have."*

The late ʿAllāma Ṭihrānī moved from Najaf to Tehran as his teacher instructed him. He then exercised his efforts at *Masjid ʾal-Qāʾim* in teaching, propagating, and elucidating the principles of the noble *sharīʿa* and the lucid path. He held many sessions in which he delivered sermons of admonishment, guidance, and illumination of the minds and hearts.

Following the change in the political system [in Iran] to a republic, ʿAllāma Ṭihrānī changed his place of residence in compliance with the instructions of his teacher. He moved to the sacred land and shrine of the eighth Imam, ʿAlī ibn Mūsā ʾal-Riḍā (upon whom be peace) and lived there until the end of his

life. Only God knows what he received there from the blessings of the light of the illuminated shrine.

He remained there except when frequenting Tehran after suffering from retinal detachment. He began visiting the proficient and highly skilled eye doctor, our dear friend and brother, Dr. Sayyid Ḥamīd Sajjādī.

Dr. Sajjādī developed great admiration for the mannerisms and conduct of ʿAllāma Ṭihrānī, and upon the completion of ʿAllāma's eye surgery, he asked to continue his acquaintance and connection with this man of God. The door of encounter was opened for him in Mashhad and Tehran. My late father would visit him every now and then in his house in Tehran. During these visits, he would ask my father questions related to ethics and the principles of mysticism and spiritual wayfaring.

This continued until an agreement was made that his eminence would deliver a course titled *"The Necessary Issues and Points which Must be Observed in One's Journey towards God."* These important lectures were delivered and elucidated in five sessions.

I must admit that a number of critical points and nuances were alluded to in these sessions which led to the

astonishment and admiration of this humble being. In truth, we must treat these sessions as a program and a guideline for spiritual wayfaring and prosperity. We must all carefully examine and exert all our efforts, focus, and care in attempting to comprehend the points, signals, signs, and allusions brought up in these lectures. We must also make these matters and subjects the foundations and principles for our lives and our journey towards God.

The present book represents the words and elaborations of a saint (*walī*) from among God's saints (*ʾawliyāʾ ʾAllā*), a perfect gnostic (*ʿārif kāmil*), and a most learned *mujtahid*, a philosopher in his own right, a proficient exegete, and an insightful critic. This servant sees that the most suitable title for this book is "*The Path of Prosperity*" (*Āyīne Rastegārī*).

We ask God Almighty to grant the soul of our ecstatic lost one (*faqīde saʿīd*), whose soul is filled with [spiritual] openings, the most elevated of degrees, and to grant our dear readers success, rectitude, and righteousness.

The Sacred City of Mashhad
1st of *Rabīʿ ʾal-Thānī*, 1432 AH
Sayyid Muḥammad Muḥsin Ḥusaynī Ṭihrānī

Chapter 1

The Purpose in God's Creation of Man

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ علىٰ محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطيّبينَ الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ علىٰ أعدائِهم أجمَعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

The human being was created so as to reach the station of servitude ; to realize themself as an absolute servant of the Creator, and to traverse the path of absolute servitude. In doing so, one surrenders everything in the realm of being (*wujūd*) to God, meaning one's being, sovereignty, life, knowledge, and strength. One is to confess that they all belong to God alone, and that poverty, weakness, ignorance, and non-being all belong to Man as such. One is to become an absolute servant of God, both on the level of their own being and on the level of their practice and responsibility. This is the station of perfection and the loftiest degree, which God, the Loftiest of all, could grant to any individual.

The incumbency of spiritual wayfaring upon everyone

The laymen of this world, including those who possess a belief and practice a religion, must traverse this path, and reach this station. The prophets and the Quran were sent to invite us to it, and if we meticulously follow the Quran and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet and the Imams while traversing on the path of absolute servitude , then we will [surely] reach that station.

Why do those who have reached the age of sixty, seventy, or even eighty but have not reached this station go back to their lack of practice? They may possess knowledge which they have gained from the Quran and religious texts; however, they employ this knowledge for worldly gains, such as the acquisition of wealth, social status, power, the love of leadership, etc. They sacrifice their knowledge of the Quran, exegesis (*tafsīr*), *ḥadīth*, philosophy (*ḥikma*), and the sciences of the *sharīʿa* for the ephemeral matters of this world, and these things, in turn, manifest themselves to the person in such forms and images. The return from this investment, when compared to the grave capital which is invested, is truly negligible.

God says in the Quran:

فأعْرِضْ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلّى عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إلاّ الحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (29) ذَلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ العِلْمِ.

`So, shun whosoever turns away from Our Remembrance and desires naught but the life of the world (dunyā). That is the extent of their knowledge. [53:29-30]

This verse commands the Prophet to steer clear of those who turn away from remembering God; people who have not moved one step beyond this lowly life, the life of lusts, sensuality, and desires. They neither believe in a life other than this low one, nor do they desire any life outside of it. The most they have achieved through the knowledge they have acquired is the enjoyment of this world. Consequently, the Prophet is commanded to turn away from them, as they are of no benefit to him.

The life of *dunyā* means the 'lowly' life, while its inverse is the life of *'ulyā* which means the 'lofty' or noble life, which refers to an elevated and exalted life. It is the life of knowledge, God-wariness, worship, honesty, piousness, altruism, and the transcendence of the self. It is the life of compassion and benevolence, the life of servitude , and one of journeying in the Presence of Absolute Unity (*ḥaḍra aḥadiyya*). It is the life of conquering one's carnal desires.

We must therefore walk on this path until we realize the truth of religion and the *sharī'a*. The purpose of the prophets' advent and the Divine scriptures' revelation must be

achieved and actualized within us. We must move on this path until we achieve the creative (*takwīnī*) and legislative (*tashrīʿī*) purposes which God intended in creating us. We must traverse the path of guidance and [spiritual] elevation, not the path of misguidance and ignorance or that of the whims and desires of the self which commands evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra*).

Subsequently, following instructions other than those found in the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet and Imams [p] will be of no benefit, for the real benefit lies exclusively within them. Even the slightest departure or diversion from their path is erroneous.

We believe the Prophet, Imam Ali, and his progeny [p] are the greatest teachers and mentors for mankind. We also believe that engaging in matters which have reached us from the Quran as well as the teachings of the Prophet and Imams [p] and adopting these teachings as a path and program for ourselves will lead us to the straight path (*al-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*). We would have sought any other path had it been superior to what we have received from them, but, such a path does not exist, for the path they have traversed is the loftiest, most illuminated, and safest of all. It is the most direct path to the destination, for there is but a single straight path, as no more than one line can be drawn between two points.

God says in the Quran:

اهدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ المُستَقِيمَ (6) صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنعَمتَ عَلَيهِمْ غَيرِ المَغضُوبِ عَلَيهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ.

Guide us upon the straight path, the path of those whom Thou hast blessed [1:6-7]

وَإِذًا لَآتَيْنَاهُم مِّن لَّدُنَّا أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا (67) وَلَهَدَيْنَاهُمْ صِرَاطًا مُّسْتَقِيمًا.

Then We would surely have granted them, from Our Presence, a great reward, and We would surely have guided them unto a straight path. [4:67-68]

Thus, it is necessary for one to move in order to reach the destination.

The first steps following one's awakening

1. Discovering who we are

Following our awakening from our [spiritual] sleep, the first and foremost step essential on this path is to [inwardly] direct ourselves towards our "self/soul" and contemplate our own existence so that we may discover our true reality. We are human beings. We wake up in the morning, work until night, and then we sleep, and we repeat this routine daily. Every person occupies themself with their own tasks and thinks not about the purpose behind what they do. Why did we come into this world? What goals do we have and where do we want to

go? How did our day go by? Today has passed; it was a blessing granted to us by God as part of our lifetime, but why did it pass? What did we earn in return for the passing of this day? If something was gained in return for the passing of a day of our lives, then it is indeed a blessing for us. However, if nothing was gained on this day, then we have incurred a loss. The Messenger of God [p] said:

مَنْ استَوَى يَوْماهُ فهُوَ مَغْبونٌ

"Verily, he whose two days are equal is at a loss."[1]

Such a person is at a loss, because a day has passed without their having earned anything in return, and only God knows what was at work to keep a human being alive for one day:

ابر وباد ومه وخورشید وفلک در کارند
تا تو نانی به کف آری وبه غفلت نخوری
همه از بهر تو سرگشته وفرمان بردار
شرط انصاف نباشد که تو فرمان نبری

Cloud and wind, moon and sun move in the sky.
That thou mayest gain bread, and not eat it unconcerned.
For thee all are revolving and obedient.
It is against the requirements of justice if thou obeyest not.[2]

Our days depend on the sun, moon, and galaxies. Everything in this world is interconnected. All the atoms of the trees, animals, etc. are interconnected and form a single reality of existence. Furthermore, they all influence and affect the daily

life of every human being. They are connected in such a manner that if one is removed from the chain of existential causes and effects, then everything will be obliterated and cease to exist. Thus, all of these beings exist in order for us to live one more day and advance in our lives. They exist for us to have the chance to remove the veils of negligence that blind our vision and become acquainted with our Creator, path, goal, our origin, and our end.

Therefore, a person who is aware of such matter will be in a state of calm, silence, serenity, and illumination, and they will be filled with energy. This is likened to a student who has just received their examination results and discovers they have passed and are the top student [in the school]. That person will receive their certificate without the slightest worry or anxiety. However, if a person spends their life in forgetfulness (*ghafla*), neglecting their studies throughout the year, they will then have to accomplish the work of a whole year in one night and beg other students to assist them on the exam. All of this will result in nothing but humility and shame.

2. Knowing our path and goal and their value

Our first duty on this path is to acknowledge that the path is God's. We are travelers, and we have a destination we wish to reach. The traveler, in truth, is our soul (*nafs*), and the destination is God. The path on which we are to travel is not

located in a desert or atop a mountain. Rather, it is a journey through the attributes of the soul (*ṣifāt al-nafs*). The negative and evil attributes are to be transformed into positive and good ones. The veil covering the heart is to be removed, and gradually, day by day, [spiritual] light (*nūr*) and awareness/consciousness (*ìdrāk*) are to increase. We are to take our souls away from the limitations, contingencies, and constraints of the physical and temporal realm and steer them toward the realm of spiritual entities and light. This is the journey and movement within the soul.

Every journey requires provisions and a means of transportation. Our provision is reliance (*tawakkul*) on God, and our means of transportation consists of seeking help (*ìstiʿāna*) from God, acting in accordance with the Quran, and following the path of the Prophet and Imams [p].

This path is traversable and has been traversed by others. A person should not belittle themself saying that they do not have the potential to traverse it. The potential is inherent in every human's own being. God also perpetually bestows it upon human beings. There is no enmity between us and God, nor do we have any previous conflicts with Him. It is with His Mercy that we were brought into existence, and it is towards His Mercy that we are moving. If God does not abandon the human

being when He creates them through a long chain of events, from being a sperm through the various stages of fetal development, and finally after birth, how can He abandon them for smaller and more trivial matters?

Thus, God is absolute Goodness and absolute Mercy, and it is to this that He invites us. Any opinion which we hold in contrast to this is surely not from God. We must search for God within ourselves and correct any misconceptions we have about Him. God is absolute Goodness.

The outcome of spiritual wayfaring

1. Arrival

After setting out on our journey, we will, God willing, eventually arrive at the destination. At that point, we will discover and realize the truth about what was said of these [spiritual] realities. Heaven is precisely as they described it to us. It truly is "*Gardens with rivers running beneath* "[2:25]. Similarly, it is mentioned in the noble Quran that the inhabitants of Heaven will tell the inhabitants of the Fire:

وَنَادَى أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ أَن قَدْ وَجَدْنَا مَا وَعَدَنَا رَبُّنَا حَقًّا فَهَلْ وَجَدتُّم مَّا وَعَدَ رَبُّكُمْ حَقًّا.

The inhabitants of Heaven will call out to the inhabitants of the Fire, "We have found that which our Lord promised us to be true. Have you found that which your Lord promised to be true?" [7:44]

2. The removal of inner darkness and rancor

God also says in the Quran:

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِم مِّنْ غِلٍّ إِخْوَانًا عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُّتَقَابِلِينَ.

We shall remove whatever rancor (ghill) lies within their breasts – as brothers, upon couches, facing one another. [15:47]

Rancor (*ghill*) refers to "impurities." For example, when sugar is melted for the purpose of making candy, a layer of impurities forms on the top. A particular substance must then be added to remove the impurities. This added substance absorbs all the impurities so that the final product is rendered pure, clean, clear, and sweet. God removes every rancor, darkness, and cloudiness from the hearts of believers in a similar fashion.

Gradually, a person will reach a level at which they view everyone, including unbelievers and wrongdoers, with love and compassion. They will be sympathetic towards them and say, "God, please guide this unbeliever to You." They will try their best to guide them and invite them to Islam, like the Prophet, who endured many wars, and many Muslims were killed so that the people could be guided to Islam and discover their own paths [to righteousness]. A person begins to view all creation with vast mercy and wishes good for everyone. They desire for

everyone to traverse the path, each in accordance with their own capacity. They wish for everyone to journey on the straight and munificent path, the path of Islam, to reach God and the destination by traversing correctly. At that point, rancor, jealousy, arrogance, angst, and deceit will cease to exist in the soul.

I spent a few days at the hospital once. On certain days, lunch was brought to us. We also had some tissue paper in the room. I tore a piece of tissue paper and put it in front of me as a tablecloth. My son was also present in the room. We dished up some food for ourselves and began to eat. At that point, I turned to my son and said, "Sayyid Muḥsin, pass me this tablecloth, for by God, even the president of the United States of America does not own a cloth like this. The size of this tablecloth does not exceed the size of a tissue paper, and here you are sitting next to me, with complete and sincere love, loyalty, sweetness, and joy filling your heart, a heart devoid of worry and torment. No leader in the world has a meal such as this." I meant that no one enjoys a meal with a clear and tranquil mind. Thus, reasonable individuals who seek this world and work for it are committing a mistake. This is because a person's movement towards the world brings nothing but torment and torture to the self. Such a person is heading towards Hell, i.e., misery. A person only takes a certain path in

order have peace of mind, and so whenever they realize that their path disturbs them, their sleep and awakening will be restless. You will find this person devising a thousand plans to defeat their opponents. What kind of life is this? And what kind of world is this? Even if one owns a golden palace that reaches the skies, which is better for the human being, to have a wooden cup filled with cold water or a golden cup filled with their own vomited blood? The presidents and kings of this world who vomit blood and then die, don't they vomit into golden cups? So, which is better – the poor, believing, Muslim individual who lives in a village and serves his wife and children cold water in a wooden cup and then says, "Thank you God" or the former? I swear to God that all the worshippers of this world are mistaken:

اهل دنيا از كهين واز مهين
لعنة الله عليهم أجمعين

The people of the world (ahl al-dunyā), great and small,
May God's curse be upon them all.[3]

The *people of the world* (*ahl al-dunyā*) in this context contrasts with the lives of the saints (*Ḥayāt ʾawliyāʾ*). In other words, it refers to those other than the '*People of God*' (*ʾahl ʾAllāh*). God's damnation (*laʿn*) means banishment and being sent away. Therefore, the meaning becomes, "may they be banished from

God, and may they become prisoners of this worldly life." For this damnation to be removed, they must remove the veils from the 'self' (*nafs*) through struggling (*mujāhada*). They must all come to this path and travel with God's *tawfīq*, and:

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَذْهَبَ عَنَّا الْحَزَنَ إِنَّ رَبَّنَا لَغَفُورٌ شَكُورٌ (35) الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِن فَضْلِهِ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ.

And they will say, "Praise be to God, Who has dispelled grief from us. Truly our Lord is Forgiving, Thankful, (35) Who, of His Bounty, has caused us to dwell in the Abode of Everlasting Life, wherein no weariness shall touch us, nor fatigue befall us." [35:34-35]

Praise belongs to the God who placed us in the Abode of Everlasting Life. It is a place of stability and an established and safe abode. God granted it out of His favor. It is a place in which no fatigue, worry, or discomfort of mind exists. It is the realm of safety, peace, and well-being. It is the realm in which the Names of God are present, especially the Name *ʾAl-Salām* (The Peace/Ever-Tranquil):

لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ.

wherein no weariness shall touch us, nor fatigue befall us. [35:35]

There is no such thing as fatigue in that abode; it is the station that human beings seek to reach. It is the station which those who traversed the path in this world will reach.

A person who chooses to sleep in this world thinking that they will later reach these stations in the afterworld is indeed mistaken. The [temporal] world is a realm of work. A student in medical school must study hard during the program. They cannot say they will begin studying only after receiving their diploma. However, if such a student does study hard, they will gain knowledge and capital, even if they do not receive a diploma. This, in itself, carries value, and so wherever the individual travels in the world, they will carry this knowledge and capital with them. On the other hand, if the student does not study, then receiving a thousand diplomas will be of no benefit to them. The certificate will be nothing more than a worthless piece of paper with which they cannot be hired for a job.

The world is the abode of movement

The [temporal] world is a place of work. God brought us into existence so that we would remain awake and aware and traverse to Him in the correct manner. All stations that are revealed and elucidated in the Quran and which were graciously given to us are for those who work in this world.

Imam Ali [upon whom be peace] said:

اليَوْمُ عَمَلٌ وَلا حِساب وغَداً حِسابٌ ولا عَمَل.

"Now there is work and no accountability, and later there will be accountability and no work."

The benefit and outcome of every act is contained within itself. Every invocation of *Allah* we utter with sincerity also contains within itself God's response, "Here I am" (*labayk*). Every movement we take towards God, glorified by He, contains within in its result and outcome.

Thus, do we want to travel towards God after He has awakened us and gifted us with the power of thought and opened our eyes? But we now see that the sun has risen, and the caravan has departed. We remained behind and slept through the night. It is our caravan that has gone and already arrived at its destination. At this point, we plead with God, "O God! What am I doing here? The sun rose. O Lord, I am stranded in this desert, alone without an assistant. I do not know where to go. I implore that You ease and cure my pain. O Lord, I rely on You and place all my burden with You. I place all my matters in Your hands. The caravan has gone, so You take my hand." This is the realm of wakefulness and caution. God will answer this plea and grant that which was asked by saying, "Now that you have awakened from your sleep and your state of forgetfulness, look

at how far the caravan has travelled. You slept through the night, and you must make up for what you missed. You must not sleep again. This is a desert and there are dangers, wild animals, and thieves here. You must take off and start moving."

Thus, the individual will begin travelling with divine support (*madad*). They will cry and repent and return to God to the same extent they had been asleep and forgetful. Repentance means to return and go back. The individual will take a look at the sins and mistakes they had committed, and then they will return and address God saying, "O God! I now admit my mistakes. You are my God, my Lord, and my Master. I will be mistaken if I ever rely on myself again. I will only rely on You." One must rely only on God.

At no place in the Quran does it mention that confidence and trust must be placed in the self. I do not know where the term "self-confidence" came from. Why should confidence be in the self? The Quran says that one must be confident in God and place the self under one's feet. The self/soul should be sacrificed for God. Self-confidence is opposed to God-confidence. It is confidence in idols rather than Truth. However, having confidence in the illuminated self/soul, which is regarded as a symbol of God (*ʾĀyat Allāh*), is having confidence in God. Conversely, having confidence in a self (*nafs*) that has not yet traversed the levels of sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*) and

remains veiled with a thousand veils and barriers is, in fact, having confidence in a thousand Hellfire. This confidence is of no use to us. This is why there is no self-confidence in the Quran. Rather, there is only God-confidence and trust in God:

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ

... *and trust in God.* [4:81]

وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى الْحَيِّ الَّذِي لَا يَمُوتُ

And trust in the Living, Who dies not. [25:58]

وَقُلِ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي لَمْ يَتَّخِذْ وَلَدًا وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ شَرِيكٌ فِي الْمُلْكِ وَلَمْ يَكُن لَّهُ وَلِيٌّ مِّنَ الذُّلِّ وَكَبِّرْهُ تَكْبِيرًا.

And say, "Praise be to God, who has no child! He has no partner in sovereignty; nor has He any protector out of lowliness." And proclaim His Greatness! [17:111]

فَاسْتَقِمْ كَمَا أُمِرْتَ

So be steadfast, as thou hast been commanded. [11:112]

All the above verses mean: O Prophet, give your heart to God.

وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا

... *and devote thyself to Him with complete devotion.* [73:8]

Sever your heart from the entire world and connect your soul to God. Devote yourself completely to God and perform all your actions for Him. This is what causes human beings to move.

A number of hindrances to one's movement

Humans are constantly occupied throughout their lives with matters such as: "What should I do;": "I lost money;" "My neighbor did such-and-such;" "My financial state is such-and–such;" "So-and-so insulted me;" "My wife's sister said such-and-such to me;" "My partner said such-and-such to me;" "I will not go to such-and-such place in spite of him for what he said to me;" "I will not answer his greetings, because he didn't answer mine before;" etc. People are entrapped and imprisoned in these sorts of thoughts and conversations, and they will die in them, because the grave of the human being is their own thoughts. The grave to which we are transported is not our grave, but the grave of the body, for our body is of clay and will return to clay. Our souls, however, will remain after death on the level it had reached at the moment of death. If our soul is polluted, then it will not be taken to the "spirituality" of the self. Our grave is our thoughts, our imaginations, our ego, etc. We must transcend our ego and sacrifice it for God. The realm which God grants an individual conforms to a specific reality,

and the individual will move on to the next world with that specific reality at the time of death.

Imam Ali [p] has issued a very spectacular statement:

قيمة كلّ امرئ ما يُحسِنُهُ.

"The value of every person is equal to that which he capable of doing (yuḥsinuh)."

This really is a magnificent statement. The worth and value of every person is that upon which they are founded and that which prevails in them. If a person's worth and value is the world, and they have spent their entire life chasing after it, then the world is their worth and value. However, if a person obeys a command of God, then this obedience has a very lofty and unparalleled station. Its value surpasses everything in this world and the afterworld. A single one of these moments is equivalent to all the pleasures of the people of the world.

The outcome of our journey will be revealed when we reach the destination

At this point, the reports of the Imams [p] will become as clear as the sun. The reports reported to us by Imams al-Sadiq and al-Ridha [p] which have been mentioned in the books" Ilal *'al-Sharā'ī*" and "*Uyūn 'Akhbār 'al-Ridhā*" are marvelous. We used

to think that they were myths, predictions, or methods of persuasion that do not coincide with reality; we thought that they were imparted to us in order to persuade and entice the human being to acquire knowledge of God, religion, and spirituality, or to keep us away and dissuade us from certain actions. This is not the case at all, for they are the truth and reality as such. Moreover, what was expressed to us are but samples and allusions, for what a person will actually witness is far greater than what was mentioned. Indeed, hearing [of something] is not tantamount to witnessing [it].

If a four-year-old child is told that copulation is sweet and pleasurable, the most they will be able to imagine and compare it with is candy. However, when they reach the age of puberty and their sexual desire awakens, they will experience the pleasure directly. The same applies to the afterworld. So long as we have neither traversed the levels and stations nor witnessed them, we will imagine that the prophets describe these matters from afar. When we arrive, however, we will see that the reality is precisely as they described, and we will ask God to reward them for their efforts. The prophets have guided humankind and placed the Truth between their hands and made it tangible. They made both Hell and Heaven tangible and perceptible for humankind, beyond conceptualization. They allowed the human being the possibility of entering it, and at that point we will say:

الحَمْدُ لِلهِ الذِي أذهَبَ عَنّا الحَزَنَ.

"And they will say, 'Praise be to God, Who has dispelled grief from us.'" [35:34]

The great efforts to which the prophets and imams went to reveal the truth to us

The prophets and imams were profound and exerted many efforts for our sake. The undeniable breaking of Lady Fatima [p]'s door, which led to her suffering a miscarriage, was tolerated for our sake. They endured all these troubles for us, to the extent of having to sacrificing *Ali ʽal-ʼAkbar* as well.

The Battle of Badr

The Prophet [p] captured seventy people at the battle of Badr. Their hands were tied with ropes, and they were taken to the city of Medina. Among the prisoners was Abbas, the Prophet's uncle. Abbas had funded a whole day of the battle's expenses on behalf of the polytheists of Quraysh, because the expenses were divided among them. The prisoners were shackled during the night to prevent them from escaping. Abbas was moaning and lamenting, and so the Prophet was unable to sleep the whole night. The companions asked the Prophet, "O Messenger of God, why do you not sleep?" He replied, "The moaning of my

uncle is keeping my awake." They told the Prophet, "Give them the order to free him." The Prophet said, "I am not the one who ordered his capture. It was God's command. There is no difference between Abbas and any other prisoner. They are all prisoners and must remain in this state."

As the Prophet passed by the prisoners, he smiled and continued to walk. One of them said, "They say that Muhammad is a mercy for mankind, yet here he is passing us by with a smile while we are shackled chains." The Prophet stood and said, "I am happy, because God commanded me to take people to Heaven even if it were via shackles and chains."

At the end of the day, each prophet had a mission. One was ordered to spread the message regardless of whether or not people listen. Another was ordered to spread the message by putting pressure on people. Another was told to use force if necessary. Another was told to put himself in danger of being killed or wounded and to take all his family members to fight, like in the battle of Badr. This battle was one of the most difficult and important ones fought by the Prophet and Muslims. In this battle, the Prophet had a cousin who was one of the greatest companions and was in the [military] ranks of Imam Ali [p] and al-Ḥamza. His leg was severed, and he became a martyr while returning from Badr to Medina. This was all undertaken to convert the polytheists to Islam. The Prophet was

commanded to do all this and invite the polytheists to Islam so that they would abstain from performing these evil acts.

The Prophet said that he smiled, because his mission was to herd them to Heaven, even if it were via shackles and chains. Sometimes a person must drive those who do not turn to Heaven themselves towards Heaven using chains and shackles.

The prisoners remained in this state until a verse was revealed to the Prophet informing the Muslims that they could choose to either release them or kill them. These seventy prisoners long represented the prominent and leading figures of evil and corruption. The Muslims were given the choice to either kill them or take a ransom, which they could then use to purchase equipment, swords, and horses. However, there would be another battle after one year in which this same number of people would be killed by the Muslims' army. That was the battle of Uhud, in which seventy Muslims were killed. The Prophet spoke to the people and told them that God revealed to him that these were their prisoners and deserved to be killed. The Muslims had the right to kill them, for they were all polytheists, or they could have held them for ransom.

God says in the Quran:

فإمّا منّا بعْدُ وإمّا فداء

Then free them graciously or hold them for ransom. [47:4]

The Muslims asked the Prophet to allow them to take ransom, because they were weak and poor. They did not have horses, camels, or swords at the Battle of Badr. The soldiers were three hundred and thirteen people in number, and their supplies were scarce. With the ransom money, they would be able to purchase supplies and cavalry and prepare themselves to face the disbelievers. They also accepted the fact that seventy of the Muslims would then be killed in the next battle [as a result]. The Prophet accepted and freed the prisoners. They collected a ransom for each of these individuals. When his uncle Abbas' turn came and he was asked to pay the ransom, Abbas told the Prophet that he did not have money, could not pay the ransom, and that he had a family to feed. The Prophet did not accept this excuse, and so Abbas insisted again. At that point, the Prophet told him that he must pay the ransom, which was, in fact, quite a hefty one. Abbas said to the Prophet, "O Messenger of God! You know that I do not have this kind of money." The Prophet told him that he knew, in fact, that he did and demanded that he pay the ransom. Abbas denied having this amount of money once again. Then, the Prophet said to him, "When you were about to leave your home, you gave your wife a bag and told her to put it in a specific location. You told her that if you return, you will know what to do with it, but if you do not, she must do such-and-such with it. Isn't that

amount equivalent to the ransom which you must pay?" At that point, Abbas cried out, "O Muhammad! Who told you this?!" Abbas could not believe what had happened, because this was something that occurred privately between him and his wife. It had occurred when he was leaving his home, and no one was present except his wife. The Prophet told him, "Allah, Allah, my Lord, my Lord, my beloved Gabriel. Gabriel descended from God and informed me." Abbas, standing there, said, "I bear witness that there is no God but God, and that you are the Messenger of God." He ordered the money to be brought from Mecca, and he handed it over to the Prophet and was then released.[4]

The point here is that the Prophet wanted to take people out of Hell and into Heaven, even if it had to be done with shackles and chains. This is the station of the vast prophetic mercy in which he sees that people must enter Heaven, because they were not created for Hell.

The Prophet [p] said:

خُلِقتُم لِلبَقاءِ لا لِلفناء

"You were created to [eternally] remain, not to perish."[5]

Some pretexts which lead to straying from the path

If a person continues to think in this lowly manner, they will become lost and go astray. This is why *ḍalāl* (to stray; go astray;

to lose one's way) has been mentioned many times in the noble Quran: في ضلال. They are lost and astray in their thoughts, and they cannot elevate [themselves spiritually]. The disbelievers and polytheists are misguided, meaning that they are lost and have gone astray in their thoughts and intentions, and they cannot move forward or pass this stage. The believers, on the other hand, do not go astray. Rather, they are in a state of advancement through the light which they have. Each and every one of them has settled in a place that is specifically theirs, in accordance with their state and rank. One whose light is stronger, knowledge vaster, piety firmer, and purity greater will have a better place.

A number of necessities for wayfaring on this path

The movement must be done by choice

This path must be traversed by choice, regardless of whether the wayfarer is a prophet, imam, or a regular individual. The levels and stations reached by the Prophet were all achieved through his personal struggle (*mujāhada*), and his duties and responsibilities were revealed to him from God.

It is necessary to keep vigil at night

God says in the Quran:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُزَّمِّلُ (1) قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (2) نِصْفَهُ أَوِ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (3) أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا (4) إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (5) إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْءًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا.

O thou enwrapped! (1) Stand vigil at night, save a little, (2) half of it or reduce it a little, (3) or add to it; and recite the Quran in a measured pace. (4) Truly We shall soon cast upon thee a weighty Word. (5) Truly the vigil of the night is firmest in tread and most upright for speech. [73:1-6]

The Prophet performed all of his worship in a secluded place known as the Cave of Hira. He did so for forty years and thus traversed all the levels and perfections. At that point, when he became a Prophet, we see God telling him anew:

قُمِ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (2) نِصْفَهُ أَوِ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا.

Stand vigil at night, save a little, (2) *half of it or reduce it a little.*

Standing in the *miḥrāb* of worship, prayer, supplications, remembrance, and attentiveness towards God at night is a great matter. During the day, one may swim in the limitless ocean of multiplicities, but at night, one must make provisions for themself and then spend [that which they gained at night] during the day. If you sleep at night, you will not be able to earn provisions, and thus you cannot spend anything during the day.

Even if you spend your provisions during the day, you will not lose anything, nor will you lose anything of your existence. Your energy, joy, self-dignity, strength, and spiritual perfection will all remain as they are. However, if you decide to spend from your own essence, then you will lose what you have and will remain empty-handed.

Acting in accordance with one's duty

'Truly We shall soon cast upon thee a weighty Word.' These are the duties of the Prophet who is *"the first entity which God created."* He is the noblest of all mankind and of all creatures. Duties and responsibilities are in accordance with the levels and stations [which a person has reached]. The Prophet accepts all these matters without hesitancy. He tells God that he welcomes any responsibility from Him and will obey His every command. *"O Lord! I am Your servant, so please assist me. Do not leave me to rely on myself. I am a weak, poor, and destitute servant."*

God says in the Quran:

وَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ لِأَنفُسِهِمْ ضَرًّا وَلَا نَفْعًا وَلَا يَمْلِكُونَ مَوْتًا وَلَا حَيَاةً وَلَا نُشُورًا.

...who have no power over what harm or benefit may come to themselves, and who have no power over death, or life, or resurrection. [25:3]

When I underwent surgery, it was as clear as the sky that I was a weak and helpless being, the poorest of the poor, and the smallest of all people on earth. In fact, I was dead, and then God gave me life again. Did we give ourselves life? Are we the ones who grant life to ourselves? Life and death are both in the hands of God. If God does not wish for us to die, we will not die, nor would we lose our consciousness. If all the doctors of the world gathered and tried to put us to sleep, they would not be able to do so. It is only when God wills that we are given anesthetics and lose our consciousness. It is only when God wills that we will wake up. It was when God willed that I have cataracts that I developed them, and it was when He willed that I be cured that I was cured. We are always under the absolute command of God.

God Almighty tells His Prophet, "O Messenger of Mine, the following must become revealed to you (and it truly did), and that is, to reach these lofty levels, i.e., the epitome of *tawḥīd* which is loftier and nobler than the *tawḥīd* of all the prophets, then you must believe that you have no power over what harm or benefit may come and no power over death, life, or resurrection:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ.

Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies sovereignty, and He is Powerful over all things. [67:1]

Thus, look at the *tawḥīd* which the Quran, being the Divine scripture, elucidates for the Messenger of God:

قُلِ اللَّهُمَّ مَالِكَ الْمُلْكِ تُؤْتِي الْمُلْكَ مَن تَشَاء وَتَنزِعُ الْمُلْكَ مِمَّن تَشَاء وَتُعِزُّ مَن تَشَاء وَتُذِلُّ مَن تَشَاء بِيَدِكَ الْخَيْرُ إِنَّكَ عَلَىَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ (26) تُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي الْنَّهَارِ وَتُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ وَتُخْرِجُ الْحَيَّ مِنَ الْمَيِّتِ وَتُخْرِجُ الَمَيَّتَ مِنَ الْحَيِّ وَتَرْزُقُ مَن تَشَاء بِغَيْرِ حِسَابٍ.

Say, "O God, Master of Sovereignty. Thou givest sovereignty to whomsoever Thou wilt, and wrestest sovereignty from whomsoever Thou wilt. Thou exaltest whomsoever Thou wilt, and abasest whomsoever Thou wilt. In Thy Hand is the good. Truly, Thou art Powerful over everything. Thou makest the night to pass into the day, and Thou makest the day to pass into the night. Thou bringest forth the living from the dead, and Thou bringest forth the dead from the living. And Thou providest for whomsoever Thou wilt without reckoning." [3:26-27]

He provides without reckoning, and His provision is not limited to bread and meat broth. Rather, the thoughts of a human being are also a provision from God, and so is the brain, life, beliefs, and faith.

Therefore, it is necessary for us lowly creatures to raise our hands to God and cry out to Him, "*O Lord! We are nothing but Your servants. We ask only You for what we need. If we want bread, we will request it from You, and if we need clothes,*

we will ask You for them. If our clothes are torn, we will not ask for a sewing needle from anyone except You."

Not asking from anyone except God does not mean that you do not ask the tailor to sew your clothes, but rather that you do not see the tailor as anyone other than God. We do not rely on the tailor, because without God's will, everything would halt until the Day of Judgment, and our clothes would remain torn. We would have been unable to sew our clothes, nor would our hands have been able to move. The tailor, shopkeeper, farmers, worker, etc., are all both signs of God and His servants. They obey His commands. It is God Who commands them to conduct their work in a specific manner, and they are all His servants. Everything is in the hands of God, be it spiritual or physical, for everything belongs to God.

Now we have seen, through our conscience, that God has granted us all these physical things as well as a brain, and that He has made us survive, since our childhood, all the dangers, rugged slopes, pitfalls, and obstacles that we have faced and continue to face millions of times each day. Any of them could have led to our death, but it is God Who has saved us from them and brought us to this point in our lives, yet we [falsely] imagine that what we have comes from our own strength and power. We think that the house we own, the

clothes we wear, the car we drive, the ring we wear, and the table we have are all from us.

At this point we say to God,

"O Lord! Grant us things that are highly precious and valuable. Everything belongs solely to You. We thank You for making us comprehend and understand this; otherwise, we would have remained where we were for the rest of our lives. We would have continued to think that only spiritual things are given by You and that these worldly matters come from the power of the human being. We would have remained as the ancient Persians, as dualists and idol worshippers, believing that there are two Gods, a God of light and a God of darkness, Yazdān and Ahriman. O Lord! There is no cause in this world except You. There is no power nor strength except what belongs to You. You alone are the Knower, the Capable, the Wise, the Sustainer. Everything is the same to You. If You will, grant us a physical or spiritual provision, an intellectual, spiritual, or self-related provision, for they are all one to You, but they are different to us. When I, the servant, wish to lift a cup that weighs either 500 or 100 grams, I say that it is light. However, if it weighed ten kilograms, I would say that it is heavy, because my strength is limited. I classify things thus as heavy or light in accordance with my limited strength. You God, however, are not limited in any way. There is nothing strong or weak when it

comes to You, or more or less, or many or few. Your strength over all creation is one; whether You want to create Gabriel or a mosquito, it is all the same for You."

This is an especially important matter. If God wanted to create Gabriel, or the Messenger of God, or an insect, there is no difference to Him in terms of strength and capability. Similarly, if He wanted to create an atom or a universe, or if He wanted to obliterate a universe or an atom, it makes no difference to Him in terms of the strength required.

We continue to say to God,

"Now that this is the case, we have finally opened our eyes and awakened ourselves, and we admit and confess that even this opening and awakening is a favor from You. Had You not willed for us to realize this, we would have remained in our sleep and heedlessness. We see thousands of people who are like us but are in the depths of their sleep, and they do not wake up. You awakened us, and so we will prostrate to You, thank You, and praise You. We will say to You, 'How gracious, beautiful, and merciful a God You are.' The will for me to wake up was Your will. My parents were righteous and so were my grandparents, and it is You who gave them the righteous and beautiful deeds. Thus, You are the Beautiful one."

فكُلُّ مَليحٍ حُسْنُهُ مِنْ جَمالِها
مُعارٌ لهُ بَل حُسْنُ كُلِّ مَليحَةِ

'Whatever youth
Is comely, or whatever maid is fair
Their beauty of her loveliness is lent
For them to wear.'[6]

Every beauty is a ray of the light of Your existence that shines upon these creations. We thank you for favoring us with your love, for if You desired, You could have chosen not to, and there is no one to make you accountable:

لا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ.

He shall not be questioned about what He does, but they shall be questioned. [21:23]

If You so desired, You could have created us from a corrupt and wretched creation, in the sense that our parents and grandparents would have been wretched and, thus, we would have been wretched as well. At the end of the day, it is all in Your hands. However, you decided to create us in this manner. We thank and praise You for making us change the perspective from which we look at things now. We now see that everything is from You. The goodness of our mothers and fathers is all from You, and our own goodness is all from You. Perfection is also from You. Now that this is the case, we ask You in terms of all the strengths which You have graciously given us, and that which You made transfer from the level of knowledge and perfection to the state of actualization, and thus made us believers and certain in our belief, and You made us care not for worldly matters or our desires, nor for fame or recognition. You awakened us and opened our eyes [to the Truth], so all praise is due to You, and we thank You for it all.

O Lord, we ask you to preserve these matters in us and to make us stand firmly on this path, because if You wish to change it, you can change it without any delay, and a Muslim would turn into a disbeliever in a blink of an eye and vice versa.'

To be a "servant" (*ʿabd*) means: to beg/implore, that is, to beg to arrive at God. To be a servant means not to ask anyone in the entirety of existence for anything, but to ask only God. However, if a person were a servant for anyone other than God, then they would not ask from God. They would ask from everything in the realm of existence, even if they were a sultan or a president, for these are the biggest beggars of all.

Buhlūl was the cousin of Harūn, and he was insane. One day, he hurried into Harūn's palace and climbed up to his throne with a *dirham* in his hand. Because he was a known person, the guards allowed him to enter without permission. Buhlūl approached Harūn and told him, "*Take this*!" Harūn opened his hand and Buhlūl placed the *dirham* in it and went back down. Harūn said, "*Let me see what this is.*" Buhlūl said, "*A person came to me today and gave me this dirham and asked me to give it to the person who begs the most, and I see that you are the most begging of beggars.*" Harūn then said, "*What are you saying?! What is this lie that you are uttering!*" Buhlūl replied, "*Every person asks and begs, but you beg more than any of them. One person might beg for one hundred dirhams,*

another for one thousand, and yet another might ask for a whole caravan. You, however, occupy this position and beg more than everyone else, because you steal from all the people; thus, you are the person who begs more than everyone else."

God could have created us in this state, but thanks to Him, He did not.

"O Lord! Preserve this state for us. Our potential has not yet reached complete actualization. Had they reached it, we would have rested our minds, but our minds are not at rest, and this is why we will keep asking You over and over again, and we will await your answer. We ask that You make all our potentialities be actualized.

O Lord! Our request and demand is You! We await Your answer. You are our only beloved One, and this is what we want. We must turn to ourselves in our seclusion and isolation and comprehend that nothing in this world will satisfy our hunger or quench our thirst except reaching You and Your beauty. Nothing but encountering and visiting You will satisfy us. This potentiality did not enter us at this moment. Rather, it is You who placed it in us; otherwise, it would not have been a request of ours. The mere fact that we are requesting this specific matter means that we can reach it and that we have been created for this reason. Because this is the case, we ask You to make our potentialities turn into actualizations, and we ask You not to take us from this

world while we are imperfect or deficient. Do not let us depart from this world before our potentialities have been actualized. If we have not yet matured, then we will cry and lament when our time of death arrives, and we will worry at that moment of our home being ruined, or that such-and-such will happen to our children, wife, or wealth."

On the other hand, if God showers His Mercy upon us and makes us arrive, then we will become joyful, because we would be departing from a confined and limited world to a vaster world, from a world of darkness to a world of light, and from the world of Satan to the world of the angels. That world will be very good and precious, and it will be filled with comfort, bounty, and a garden of bliss. It will be a world filled with God's pleasure and meetings with God's saints, imams, and prophets. It will be the arrival at the station of:

أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ

or nearer. [53:9]

All the veils will be removed, and the human being will be:

فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِندَ مَلِيكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ

upon a seat of truth before an Omnipotent King. [54:55]

The person would be near the Lake-Fount of *Al-Kawthar*, *Zamzam*, and the station of the *walāya* of Imam Ali. He will have:

ما لا عَيْنٌ رَأتْ وَلا أذنٌ سَمِعَتْ وَلا خَطرَ عَلى قلبِ بَشَر

What an eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.

This is where they will live and dwell. Undoubtedly, God also gives these matters to the human being in this world before they die. Is there anything higher than this? That a person has a way to these stations in this world in this simple manner is an undeniable fact.

Hātif Isfahānī says:

هاتف، ارباب معرفت که گهی
مست خوانندشان و گه هشیار
از می و جام و مطرب و ساقی
از مغ و دیر و شاهد و زنار
قصد ایشان نهفته اسراری است
که به ایما کنند گاه اظهار
پی بری گر به رازشان دانی
که همین است سر آن اسرار
که یکی هست و هیچ نیست جز او
وحده لااله الاهو

O Hātif! The people of Gnosis whom You see once drunk and once sober.
[When they speak] of wine, the wine glass, the minstrel, the cupbearer,

The fire-worshippers (mogh), monasteries, the idols (shāhid),
and [a religious] girdle (zannār)
Hidden in their actions are secrets.
Which they reveal at times through gestures
You will know, should you discover their secret.
That it is the secret of secrets:
That there is naught but One
There is no Lord but He, Alone

Elsewhere he says:

یار بی پرده از در ودیوار
در تجلّی است یا أولی الأبصار

The Beloved is manifest from behind the wall and door,

Thus comprehend, O people of comprehension

He then says:

شمع جویی ٓ وآفتاب بلند
روز بس روشن وتو در شب تار
گر ز ظلمات خود رهی بینی
همه عالم مشارق الأنوار

Do you search for a candle though the sun is shining?
You are in the darkness of night though the day is bright.
If you rid your soul of its darkness,
You will see that the entire world is shining with light.

Chapter 2

To See Nothing but God

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ علىٰ محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطّيّبينَ الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ علىٰ أعدائهم أجمَعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

The conditions of spiritual wayfaring

Spiritual wayfaring is simultaneously the most difficult and the easiest of tasks. It is the most challenging task, because the 'self' (*nafs*) becomes habituated to the multiplicities (*katharāt*) of this world. It becomes habituated to desires (*shahwa*), forgetfulness (*ghafla*), and to the colors and scents of this lowly world. One must abandon all these for the sake of God. On the other hand, it is the easiest of tasks because the habituation and delight (*ʾuns*) which a human experience with multiplicities do not lead to happiness. In fact, they are nothing but sorrow, burdens, darkness, and unhappiness. Connecting to God and transcending all these matters is regarded as traveling to the realm of vastness and limitlessness (*ʾiṭlāq*) and to comfort and mercy. Moreover, it is God Himself who will take the hand of

the wayfarer on this path. Thus, bonding with God makes it the easiest of paths.

There are several directives by which one must abide on this path, some of which are mentioned in *"Kernel of the Kernel"* [ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī] and Sayyid Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's *"Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring."* In my turn, I will be stating the most important of them in a general fashion. These are matters which a person must always keep in mind, for they will both assist and prepare them throughout the path of wayfaring. This path requires: (1) self-accountability (*muḥāsaba*), (2) remembrance (*dhikr*), and (3) worship (*ʿibāda*).

1) High ambition

Of the necessary things one must possess is a high ambition (*himmate boland/himma ʿāliya*). This means that a person should be looking only towards God. They must act solely for God, never renounce Him, and never be satisfied with anything less than Him. Anything that a person does which is not for God will never bring ease or peace to the soul. The soul will never be satiated with the results of an act that is done for anything or anyone other than God, because a person is only compensated in accordance with the goal and object of desire for which they perform their actions.

For example, what will a person, whose sole objective for performing a certain act is to be referred to as a scholar by others, earn on the Day of Judgment? They will be told on that day that they have already received what they sought in the world (*dunya*), as people refer to them as such, but what have they brought with themself to the afterworld (*ākhira*)? Similarly, if a person who spends their wealth by giving to the poor and needy so that others will refer to them as a religious, generous, and wealthy individual was indeed being referred to as such by others, what would they take with themself to God? However, if a person acts for the sake of God and only has Him as their objective, then their reward will be God Himself.

The only thing for which a person should exchange his soul is God, His love and remembrance.

God says in the Quran:

الا بذِكر اللهِ تَطمَئِنُ القلوبُ

Verily in the remembrance of God do hearts find comfort.

[13:28]

The soul of whoever becomes pleased and content with anything less than God will forever remain unsatiated, and they will not reach the goal.

A wayfarer must act solely for God

A wayfarer must perform their actions solely for God. Their prayers, fasting, spending, and remembrance must all be done for God, as He commanded us to perform these actions. Thus, a servant of God must perform what He commanded. One must not perform these acts for the sake of seeing good dreams, though these come as natural results of self-purification. A person's intention should not be to receive dreams or visions or to have certain things revealed to them while they are awake; nor should it be to gain the ability to know people's hidden thoughts, their past, or foreknowing their future. It also should not be to acquire the knowledge of occult sciences or to gain the ability to cure through their willpower the sick and ill. Nor should it be to acquire a peculiar ability/power to alter certain aspects of the substances of existents, such as destroying a mountain with a special willpower or moving a train. This is all contrary to spiritual wayfaring, the path of *ʿirfān*, and the path of God, for all these goals and objectives are petty and beneath God. The objective of the path of *ʿirfān* is God and annihilation in God. This is the gnosis of God.

Assume that a person, through spiritual discipline, is able to understand the language of the birds. This is by no means regarded as perfection for the spirit/soul. Rather, it is like any form of worldly knowledge or perfection which a

human may possess or acquire. It is a form of knowledge related to the realm of the world. Some people, for example, can gather and acquire information from anywhere in the world using radios, radars, etc. Others, through their 'self,' can comprehend the language of certain creatures. For example, they can understand what two pigeons are communicating to each other or what exists behind a mountain. This is a class of knowledge and is regarded as a category of the sciences which terminates at death. It neither results in any perfection for the human being in the afterworld, nor entails gaining proximity to God.

An ascetic once came to Imam al-Sadiq [p]. The Imam asked him, *"Are you a Muslim?"* The ascetic replied, *"No, I am not. I am a polytheist."* The ascetic continued, *"I can reveal certain things to you, and I have the knowledge of the unseen,"* and so he began informing the Imam of a number of hidden things. The Imam then asked him, *"What is in my hand?"* The ascetic began pondering and then answered, *"It is the egg of a pigeon that was behind a specific mountain in a specific location. I wandered around all the places and saw that everything was still in its place except for this egg. Thus, I knew that it is in your hand."* The Imam opened his hand and said, *"You are correct. How did you reach this state?"* He answered, *"By negating my self (nafs)."* The Imam then told him, *"Convert to Islam."* The ascetic replied, *"I will not."* The Imam then said to him, *"Oppose your*

nafs in this matter." The ascetic then testified, *"I testify that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is the messenger of God."* The Imam then closed his hand again and asked him, *"What's in my hand?"* The ascetic was unable to know, for matters ceased to be revealed to him. The Imam then opened his hand and said, *"It is the same egg that was previously in my hand."* Everything ended at this point and culminated with *tawḥīd.* Through this testimony the ascetic reached the Divine light and discovered a connection with God which rendered the knowledge he had as naught. It was all stripped away from him. The knowledge which he possessed was worldly and belonged to the physical realm. He worked very hard to acquire that knowledge; however, its reality was beneath *tawḥīd* and disconnected from it. Now he had reached the pinnacle point of *tawḥīd.* Thus, whatever descends upon him from that realm was valuable and perpetual.

God says in the Quran:

مَا عِندَكُمْ يَنفَدُ وَمَا عِندَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ

That which is with you comes to an end, but that which is with God endures. [16:96]

The Imam [p] retrieved the bird's egg through the Divine light (*nūr ilāhī*) and then revealed it to the ascetic. This knowledge

remained with the Imam. When the Imam showed the egg to the ascetic for the second time, it was the same egg, but the ascetic had lost the ability to know, even though he had previously been able to see everything in the world. This knowledge did not remain with the ascetic, because his path was incorrect. When he converted to Islam, however, he reached *tawḥīd.* A person must work for God just as a servant must work for their master. A servant is not free to make their own decisions. Rather, they are the property of their Master God and must work only for Him. The value of anything done for other than God is equal to the value of the act itself. If a person greets another person so that he can be greeted back, then the value of this act is the reply which he receives and nothing more.

On the other hand, greeting a person with the intention of bringing them joy and happiness or praying for them with this intention is a loftier matter indeed, regardless of whether the other person returns the greeting or not. A person may perform certain actions so that God will grant them paradise, and in and of itself, this is a good thing. However, the act which is performed to earn paradise is an act which is lacking God. This is not in the sense that Heaven is regarded as a manifestation of God and His will, or that it is of His creation. Nor is it in the sense that the signs of God manifest in all the states of paradise,

and it is God Who is manifested throughout them and thus the individual will accept paradise as far as God grants it, because in it lies His pleasure and will. Rather, what is meant here is the person who works to enter paradise solely for their own pleasure, i.e., to have houris or something similar. In this case, God will grant them paradise because they have worked for it. However, they are not entitled to anything loftier than it and cannot say to God, "*O Lord, I wish to encounter You as well.*" Nor can they object by saying, "*O Lord, why did you place me in paradise and not grant me the success (tawfīq) of encountering you? And why have you not placed me in the 'station of content (riẓwān)' which You describe in the following verse*:

رَّضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ

God is content with them, and they are content with Him. [5:119]

God will answer by asking, "*Why did you perform these actions? To get houris? To gain trees [in paradise]?*

جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِن تَحْتِهَا الأَنْهَارُ

Gardens with rivers running beneath. [3:15]

Thus, it is this that you will have earned and will receive." On the other hand, if a person performs their actions out of fear of entering Hellfire, then God will not place them in Hell. Similarly, this person cannot then object to God and say, "*O Lord, I wish*

to encounter you! I want to be in Your company, with those who speak with You. I wish to be the interlocutor of God (Kalīmullāḥ)," for the answer will be, *"Such station is not what you worked for. You worked to save yourself from Hell, and this is what you will be granted."*

Imam Ali [p] says:

إنّ قوْماً عَبَدوا الله رَغبَة، فتِلكَ عِبادَةُ التُجّار، وَإنّ قوْماً عَبَدوا الله رَهْبَة، فتِلكَ عِبادَةُ العَبيد، وَإنّ قوْماً عَبَدوا الله شُكراً فتِلكَ عِبادَةُ الأحْرار.

"People are of three categories: Those who worship God out of desire [for His reward], and this is the worship of the merchants. Then there are those who worship God out of fear [of His punishment], and this is the worship of the slaves. Then there are those who worship God out of thanks to him, and this is the worship of the free ones."

Those who worship God out of a desire for Heaven are performing the worship of merchants, and the worship of those who worship God out of fear of Hellfire is the worship of the slaves who obey commands out of fear of their masters. There is, however, a group of worshippers of God who worship Him out of love and longing for Him. This does not mean that they have the strength to tolerate the Hellfire, or that they like it; nor does it mean that they do not enjoy Heaven or that it does not make them happy. Rather, it means that their actions and striving were done solely for God. Their actions, intentions, beliefs, and rewards are God, His love, for they are His servants and work for Him. If God wishes to place them in the Hellfire,

they will accept it, and if He wishes to place them in Heaven, they will also accept it, because their actions were performed only for God, and nothing else.

In the world of *ʿirfān,* the wayfarer must perform their actions for God. Their intention should not be to see dreams in their sleep or to receive visions, nor should it be to improve their situation, elevate their status, to be given the role of an intercessor on the Day of Judgment, or to sit with the angels, etc. These matters do not exist in spiritual wayfaring. One must perform their acts solely for God.

If Gabriel approaches a wayfarer and says, *"I will give you whatever you ask for; God commanded me to take you to Heaven and show you everything in it,"* the wayfarer must respond by saying, *"I am a servant of God. My master is God, and I seek nothing but Him."* If Gabriel says, *"God asked me to grant you the station of intercession, so accept it,"* a wayfarer must respond by saying, *"I am a servant of God. If He grants it to me, then so be it, and if He does not, then I am indifferent to it. It is all up to Him. I have no will or desire outside of His. I choose nothing for myself."*

Imagine if Gabriel comes and says, *"I will grant you the ability to earn wealth and sustenance without difficulty. God will give it to you directly. Do you want that?"* If a person accepts this offer,

then God will grant them anything they wish, but that is where it ends.

The story of Sayyid al-Qāḍī with Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm

The late Sayyid Ali al-Qāḍī was one of the great and profound mystics. He was among the unique individuals of the 20th century. A person named Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm, an Arab who resided in the city of *Al-Kāẓimayn* (Kadhimiya), often visited al-Qāḍī to obtain spiritual programs from him. He had met al-Qāḍī for the first time when the latter would go for a walk near the shore from al-Kufa mosque to al-Sahlah Mosque. Al-Qāḍī regularly visited al-Sahlah Mosque and would remain there for a number of nights, spending them in worship. Al-Qāḍī was elderly at that time and thus walked calmly and placidly. Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm often said to him, *"I myself have come to your honorable presence to obtain a spiritual program, etc."* He was a very diligent person when it came to spiritual development. He tamed his "self" and combatted it. He had also received spiritual training under a number of teachers of *ʿirfān*. However, his hands remained empty, until he met this great teacher. His hope was that by God's will, the gate [of God-realization] would open before him, he would reach his desired goal, and thereby, he would realize

the reality of ʿ*irfān* and reach the pure pinnacle of Divine unity (*tawḥīd*). In other words, all the stations and levels a person traverses are but preliminaries to that final goal.

On one of his visits, Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm walked with al-Qāḍī by the shore until they reached al-Sahlah Mosque. Al-Qāḍī turned to Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm and said, "*Talk to me about what you do for a living.*" Mīrzā answered, "*I do not work.*" Al-Qāḍī then asked, "*Why don't you work*?" Mīrzā replied, "*Because I get what I need instantaneously. If I ask for anything, it will immediately appear before me. Watch how I get a fish out of the water right now.*" As soon as he uttered this sentence, a fish came out of the water. Everything he wanted appeared in this fashion. Al-Qāḍī said nothing of the matter after that until they reached al-Sahlah Mosque. They then sat down and al-Qāḍī gave Mīrzā a spiritual program and said, "*You must work. Working and earning an income is one of the ordainments of Islam, and thus you must work.*"

Following this incident, all of these abilities ceased for Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm. The fish would never come to him in that manner again. If he desired wheat, bread, or water, he would not get any of it in the manner in which he was accustomed. Al-

Qāḍī stripped him of everything during that meeting. He wanted Mīrzā to come to the Path of *Tawḥīd* (*Ṣirāṭ al-tawḥīd*), which is the path of servitude (*ʿubūdiyya*). For a person to reach the state of a servant of God, desiring a fish, a chicken, or not having to work has no meaning. A servant must be wary and concerned with what God expects of him. What did God command me to do? What did the Prophet say? In this case, if all the meals of the world were brought to him, he would say, *"I am prepared to eat only bread and vinegar if that is what God asks me to do."* A person must say, *"I will carry a plow on my back and dig wells just as the Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali, did, and I will plant palm trees so that my Master becomes pleased with me."* This is how a person must act and behave, and Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm did not possess these qualities at that time.

The Prophet and the Imams possessed spiritual states and powers far greater than those possessed by the saints. They were able to revive the dead and control everything in existence with a single will (*ʾirāda*). Yet, Imam Ali would carry a plow with his hands and go to the palm grove to plow and plant date seedlings, and he would build canals. He would sweat and become tired. He could have used his willpower, just as Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm did, to instantaneously land a fish on the shore and eat

it. The prophets and imams possessed spiritual gifts thousands of times more powerful than those which Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm possessed. However, if one wishes to reach the station of *tawḥīd*, one must surpass these matters. When the late al-Qāḍī gave Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm a spiritual program and initiated him into the realm of *tawḥīd*, he took everything else away from him. Mīrzā then experienced many extraordinary spiritual states and acquired magnificent abilities, and he experienced states of *tawḥīd*.

I did not see Mīrzā ʾIbrāhīm myself. He passed away in *Al-Kāẓimayn* when I was in Najaf. He died by electrocution in Kadhimiya by a wire from decorative lights hanging in front of a shop during one of the festivals. He was a great man who reached the realm of *tawḥīd*.

A person's actions in the world of *ʿirfān* and spiritual wayfaring must be done for God, regardless of whether the wayfarer sees a dream or not. One must not direct their attention towards such things. If one happens to receive a vision, then it is from God. But if they do not, then they must not seek or chase after one. What is truly important and fruitful is that which is given by God, not that which a person seeks or

requests. Thus, we must, from the very beginning of the path, put aside any request other than God. A dream which is incidentally seen by a person is that which is beneficial, for connecting with immaterial spirits and meeting with them is a beneficial matter as is witnessing the realms of light. However, they are only beneficial when a person neither asks for them nor seeks them, but when God Himself grants them.

Therefore, from the beginning of the path to its end, one must have nothing in mind other than God. One must not work for anyone except God, make anything equal to God, or exchange actions and goals for anything less than God. If anything is revealed to them through a vision during their journey, then so be it. If nothing is revealed to them, that also is no problem at all, because a vision is not a sign of proximity to God, nor is its absence a sign of distance from Him. The sign of proximity is directing oneself to God, His remembrance, and entering His sanctuary. Conversely, the sign of distance from God is the absence of the desire to be His servant and the absence of a craving or longing for the remembrance of God. Furthermore, being concerned with the multiplicities of this world and lustful/desirous matters, being heedless of God, loving social status, wealth, and positions of authority, or being enamored by these same majestic and illuminative matters, which are considered to be veils of light (*ḥujub nūrāniyya*), are

all considered signs of distance from God. All these matters will vanish, and nothing but God will remain, and this is the sign of proximity to God. The following is mentioned in a supplication:

اللهُمَّ ارْزُقني التّجافي عَنْ دار الغُرور، والإنابة إلى دار الخُلود والاستِعْداد للموت قبلَ نُزوله.

"O Lord! Grant me aversion from the world of deception/delusion, and attraction to the everlasting world. And grant me preparation for death before it strikes me."[7]

To know the correctness of one's path is to look deep within oneself and contemplate to see whether their attention and direction is focused on that higher realm, the realm of truth (*ḥaqīqa*) and reality (*wāqiʿ*), light (*nūr*) and purity (*ṭahāra*), and honesty (*ṣidq*) and sincerity (*khulūs*). One must then observe oneself to see whether it is averse to the realm of temptations, accidents, and delusions or not. Moreover, one must contemplate whether the "self" is unconcerned with mundane thoughts, such as personal disputes or other internal struggles related to wanting to defeat one's adversaries, competing for social recognition and status, or fighting over wealth and resources, etc. These all terminate with death, and thus one must not occupy themself with them. A sign which indicates that one's path is correct is that one finds themself more and more concerned with the immaterial realm. Gradually, a person will completely relinquish and renounce this world, so that they

are better prepared for death. In other words, such a person will have journeyed towards the realms of non-physical entities, to the realm of holiness, and will have experienced the realm of sincerity prior to death. In this case, owning something, such as furniture or a carpet, or not is no different to the individual, for neither is the presence of an object considered harmful nor is its absence beneficial. The truth surpasses all these matters. A person will reach the station of servitude of God when the carpet occupies the floor and not their heart. However, if the carpet enters the heart and becomes attached to it, then its threads will entangle and seal it. This is a vice and could even occur with pettier things, such as a straw mat. If this mat occupies the heart of an individual, it will transform into hellfire. However, if a person sits on a carpet not because their heart is attached to it, but rather because God is pleased with them sitting on it, as sitting on a straw mat might give others the impression that they are a humble ascetic and are thus labelled as such in accordance with their norms and conception of this notion, this will lead eventually to their sanctification. When it comes to social norms and customs, one must be balanced by neither over-indulgence nor complete neglect of them. One must perform their duties and not give people a chance to speak about them [negatively], thus avoiding harm in this regard.

It is not problematic for a person to own a house in which they meet their own and their family's needs. This would also relieve them of the burden of rent and free their minds of worry. These are all godly considerations, not satanic or selfish ones. However, a problem arises when a person owns a carpet or an entire mountain, and their heart is so attached to it that they are not prepared to give it up even if God orders them to do so. This is like a dervish becoming attached to his bindle [which he uses to display his poverty], which thus turns into a veil between them and God. On the other hand, a person who dwells in a luxurious garden next to a water basin but is detached from it is in fact dwelling in the world of light and illuminations.

In this sense, gnosis (*ʿirfān*) is a very intricate, subtle, delicate, and calculated matter. It is not founded upon delusions, illusions, or artificiality. Rather, gnosis is founded upon the True and Real because the direction of journeying is towards the Truth. Consequently, this journey entails the removal of all illusions and superstitions, and the repelling of all impurities and additives. It eliminates confined limitations and lowly conceptualizations by burning them. Man is then liberated and moves toward a lofty realm, one of noble thinking, a majestic intention, and an exalted noble path. This is the outcome and result of *ʿirfān*.

Man must, therefore, pay heed to the fact that God alone is to be worshipped. We must thank God when we awaken from our sleep and say:

الحَمْدُ لِلهِ الذِي أحْياني بَعْدَ ما أماتَني وَإلَيْهِ النُّشور

Praise be to God who granted me life after causing me to die, and to Him is the return.[8]

Thus, we thank Him for bringing us back to life again, so that we can journey and travel to Him.

الحَمْدُ لِلهِ الذِي رَدَّ عَلَيَّ روحي لأحْمِدَهُ وأعْبُدَه

Praise be to God who restored my soul so that I [can] praise and worship Him.[9]

Our return from death and awakening again from sleep is to "*praise and worship Him;*" hence, worship and any action performed by a wayfarer is for God alone, and not for one's "self." This is an extremely critical matter.

2) Perseverance, patience, and tolerance on the path of wayfaring towards God

Another crucial and necessary condition for spiritual wayfaring which a wayfarer must always bear in mind is the matter of

possessing perseverance (*ìstiqāma*), patience (*ṣabr*), and endurance (*taḥammul*), that is, enduring complex problems and difficulties, and practicing 'beautiful' patience[10] when faced with irritating and inconvenient matters. The reason for this is that this path is the path towards God, and it is evident that a person will face difficulties and obstacles on any path upon which they choose to walk. If they become fatigued because of these obstacles, then they will remain in place. If a person embarks on a path in this world and is faced with obstacles such as a rugged terrain, river, or trench and decides that they cannot cross them, then they will remain in place. Similarly, if a person wishes to go to Mecca, then they must cross a river and a trench and remove obstacles from their path. Additionally, they must be ambitious so that they can eventually navigate the path.

The obstacles on the path of spiritual wayfaring

The path of *sayr wa sulūk* contains many more obstacles than those found on the physical paths in this world. People are accustomed to the difficulties and tribulations in the physical and temporal realm. People overcome their problems without much trouble or concern. The path of the afterworld, on the other hand, is much more difficult, as the self is not entirely accustomed to it. For example, a person who wants to become

a doctor naturally faces numerous obstacles which must be moved out of the way. The person must travel abroad to study and endure the difficulties and tribulations which come with that. When they wish to study at night, they must abandon any thought of comfort and think of nothing like taking a walk or relaxing. It is only after all these thoughts are abandoned that one can begin to study. Therefore, reaching this goal relies on patience and endurance. The same goes for a person who wishes to become an entrepreneur, a leader, or a governor on earth. This person will face thousands of barriers and problems that await them on the path. Governors and presidents do not reach their positions easily. On the contrary, they make thousands of sacrifices and undergo thousands of travels; they subject themselves to the whims and desires of the governing pharaohs, and at times, they are even forced to create alliances with their enemies, all in pursuit of reaching their desired goals.

The same applies to the path of God (*ṭarīq Allā*). It is necessary to transcend the "self" and the veils (*ḥujub*) of darkness (*ẓulmāniyya*) and light (*nūrāniyya*). Examples of the veils of darkness are the love of recognition and social status, love of leadership, greed, envy, malice, and other vices that exist in the self.

Transcending the veils of light, on the other hand, involves transcending houris and the stations (*maqāmāt*) of the afterworld, and striving to reach the highest goal, which is God Himself. If at any point during the journey, the traveler is shown anything that they cannot transcend or surpass, then that traveler will remain at that point.

An incident related to ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī is recounted in *The Shining Sun*. A houri approached the scholar while he was occupied with his invocations (*dhikr*) in al-Kufa mosque.[11] A similar incident occurred to Sayyid Gulpaygānī when he witnessed a vision (*mukāshafa*) in which he entered a garden which had a pool with a number of young women sitting around it. These young women all belonged to him, and he was permitted to do whatever he pleased with them. However, if he chose to engage with them, he would stop at that [spiritual] station and not advance anymore. Even though the houris were completely permissible (*ḥalāl*) and belonged to him, their true purpose was to elevate him to a higher station, like a class that one must pass in order to move on to another class. That is why the late Sayyid Gulpaygānī said the following truthful statement: *"I saw that they are not permissible to me,"* "impermissible" meaning that if he occupied himself with them, he would remain at the same level. For this reason, he said that he must leave the garden, and what he said was indeed

excellent and correct. It is by God's grace that he left the garden; otherwise, he would have remained in the same state in which he already was.

The incident ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī experienced was similar. A heavenly houri approached him, bothered by the fact that he was not paying attention to her. She got up and approached him from different sides in an attempt to catch his attention. ʿAllāma Ṭabāṭabāʾī said, *"My heart breaks every time I remember the houri and how she walked away heartbroken and dismayed, because I am the one who saddened her. But I had no choice. My master commanded me not to pay attention to anything other than God while I am in a state of attentiveness (tawajjuh) to Him."*

To clarify this matter a bit more, I will give another example. Imagine a person is busy performing their prayers (*ṣalāt*) and focusing all their attention (*tawajjuh*) on God; suddenly, the most beautiful woman in the world is brought to them, and they are informed that she is permissible and has been married to them. They are told to gaze upon her and her beauty, knowing that it is permissible to look during prayers. Naturally, this person will lose their focus and attentiveness. However, if we assume that this person was completely

immersed in attentiveness toward God, and that they witness the same spiritual vision during their prayer, they will surely not pay attention to the beautiful woman, because they are occupied with speaking to God. God is prioritized above all houris, and a single moment of seclusion with Him is more valuable than thousands of houris. All of their beauty and perfection are from Him, for they are His manifestations and the beauty of His creation. He is the Creator of beauty and perfection. A wayfarer wishes to reach the peak of the mountain. If the wayfarer wishes to continuously stop and sit at a plateau, then they will remain below the peak. A wayfarer must continue elevating until they reach the peak of the mountain of *tawḥīd*. This mountain has a lot of hurdles and obstacles. The wayfarer must endure the heat and cold and must take a climbing stick and provisions along with them. During their journey, others will try to obstruct their path and question them, *"Where are you going? What are you doing? Why have you become an ascetic? You have the chance to become a leader like all these other leaders, so do this and leave that. Don't you care about yourself? Don't you care to bring joy and comfort to yourself? You are still young, so come and participate in this conference or that gathering so that you can beat your opponents. So-and-so is no better than you are. In fact, you are better than they are. So-and-so owns both a*

summer and a winter palace, and so-and-so owns such-and-such brand of car. All these opportunities are ahead of you, and now is your chance to achieve all of this and more."

Satan comes at this point and begins whispering to the wayfarer. If the wayfarer listens and succumbs to Satan's temptations, they will forever remain stuck in these matters and their journey will halt and come to an end. However, if one wishes to climb and reach the peak of the mountain and is incapable of taking anything with them, including a small carpet, then they must abandon carrying a radio and television and throw them to the ground, because they cannot carry any of these things with themself. One must be as lightweight as possible. Mountain climbers wear very light clothing and the lightest shoes. They do not carry food with them but eat a few dates and other sweet things. Whenever they feel hungry, they eat a date to regain some strength and energy. If a mountain climber were to take broth, soup, grilled birds, or chicken with them on a climb, they would not be able to get far in their journey.

How to overcome obstacles on the path

The same applies to *tawḥīd*. A person will face many problems and difficulties, and these must be eliminated and removed through Divine grace and strong aspirations/ambition. A person

must overcome all the difficulties and remove all barriers through reliance on God (*tawakkul*) and seeking the intercession (*tawassul*) of the Imams [p], especially Imam al-Mahdi [p] who is the possessor of the station of the Truth's absolute authority/sanctity (*wilāya kulliyya ilāhiyya*). He represents the intermediary of Divine effusion (*wāsiṭat al-fayḍ*) between God and His creation at all times, in all states, and in all places. Thus, relying on God and seeking the intercession of Imam Mahdi and the other Imams [p] will remove all the obstacles from one's path.

If a person comes to a wayfarer and invites that person to accompany them to a gathering, the wayfarer must decline and say that they are busy and will not be able to make it, even though going to the gathering in and of itself is not considered forbidden. Not only are gatherings not beneficial, but they are also a waste of time. The person might then start criticizing the wayfarer by saying, *"Why don't you ever go out? It is like you have disappeared in a long prostration (sajda)! Have you become a Sufi? You better have not started associating yourself with them!"* If a person pays heed to these words, then they will come to a stop. Has a long prostration become a symbol restricted to Sufis? Even if we were to assume that a certain group of Sufis, with whom we differ, perform long prostrations to God, then they have done a good deed for themselves. Long

prostrations were performed by the likes of Imam Mūsā b. Jaʿfar [p], Imam al-Sajjād [p], Imam Ali [p]. Were the mystical states into which they were thoroughly drawn during their prayers and worship all fairytales? Or must we emulate them and walk in their footsteps?

Whenever a person seeks to become one with the True One and chooses the path of purification and contemplation of the "self" and seeks to gain proximity to these grand personalities, they will immediately face attacks and slander by others. They will be labelled and put down. Others will say things like, *Look! They are putting on a show of asceticism and holiness. They must be Sufi! They prostrate for a long time, perform dhikr, do not speak much, and isolates themself. Why did they become like this*?"

One should reply to them by saying, "*At the end of the day, you do not know the pain this person has. You are oblivious to what is in the heart of this wayfarer. Concern yourself with your own occupations and all these barriers and problems with which you have imprisoned yourself. Keep doing whatever you do from morning to night. Enjoy the petty worldly things which are worthless, for the world and everything in it are nothing more than this.*'

"As for me, the wayfarer, I experience an internal pain and a yearning deep within. My pain is God, and it will not ease until I reach Him. You know nothing of the flame that is burning in my heart. Otherwise, you would be silent like me. I am not pretending with my silence. Rather, it is the effect of that internal grief and sadness which engulfs my heart. The flame in my heart has burnt all my existence and prevents me from attending gatherings which are joyful to you. It prevents me from sitting with you and joking, backbiting, and harming others. I cannot do any of this. Say of me what you will, but I cannot partner in your deeds."

This requires patience and perseverance. Slowly and gradually these obstacles will be defeated. Trials and tribulations will attack from all directions. The wayfarer will be criticized, humiliated, and will hear harsh words from people. They might also hear undeserved compliments. A wayfarer must cast all these aside should they wish to reach their goal, and the wayfarer must say, *"I am working for God, and once God is pleased, nothing else matters. Criticize me all you want."*

A person must also avoid getting into arguments and quarrels with people. One must remain concerned with continuing their path and going about their own way.

God says in the Quran:

وَعِبَادُ الرَّحْمَنِ الَّذِينَ يَمْشُونَ عَلَى الأَرْضِ هَوْنًا وَإِذَا خَاطَبَهُمُ الجَاهِلُونَ قَالُوا سَلامًا.

The servants of the Compassionate are those who walk humbly upon the earth, and when the ignorant address them, say, "Peace," [25:63]

The servants of the Compassionate' refers to servants of God, i.e., not servants of the world, desires, heedlessness, or anything ungodly. These servants walk humbly and tranquilly upon earth. When the ignorant address them, they pay no heed but resume their duties in peace and move along.

Suppose that a person was walking down an alley and a dog started barking at them. Would anyone object to the dog and tell it, "*Why are you barking at me? I did not do anything wrong to you for you to treat me like this.*" This is how a person must perform their duties and continue moving along. One should not engage with the ignorant, nor quarrel with them, nor confront them in an attempt to convince them of the validity of what one is doing. Under certain circumstances, engaging and conversing with these individuals might be beneficial, may bring them closer to God, and will show them the path. In such a case, it would not be problematic to engage with them. On the other hand, there are ignorant individuals who wish to draw a person into their own arena; they attempt to influence a person

and bring them into their own circle of thoughts so that such a person becomes like them.

When dogs surround a carcass, they all compete for it with one another. Every dog tries to get the biggest share for itself. However, if a person walks by them, they will all unite and attack that person as a single pack. The reason for this is that they all have the same objective with regards to the carcass, so they compete with one another. However, the person walking by differs from them, and thus they all unite against them and bark at them: *"Why are you a human? Why do you have different motives? Why are you above us?"* They do not create a commotion among themselves when it comes to eating from the carcass, but they do when it comes to dealing with a human who differs from them. This is how ignorant people behave. When their path is not God's path, they will try to drag you into their own circle.

The Commander of the Faithful, Imam Ali [p], once said:

النّاس ثلاث: عالمٌ ربّاني، ومتعلمٌ على سبيل النّجاة، وهَمجٌ رُعاع.

"People are of three types: (1) a person of knowledge who is godly (rabbānī), (2) a person acquiring knowledge while walking on the path of salvation, and (3) the confused rabble."12

The third category of people speak as follows: *"Come to us and start thinking like us. Adopt our ideas, beliefs, and become one of us."* If a person gives in to them, even slightly, that person

becomes like a sacrificed animal. The head will be severed first, the rest of the body will subsequently be cut into pieces, and then the pieces will all be collected together and taken away. A believer must stand firmly in their place, equipped with faith and reliance on God.

المؤمنُ كالجبَل الرّاسخ، لا تُحرّكهُ العواصِفُ.

A believer is like a firm mountain that storms cannot move.

A storm can move trees and destroy them, and it can also destroy homes. However, even the strongest storm cannot move a mountain from its place. This is how a believer is, like a *firm mountain*. A believer is on the path of the Truth and is equipped with the power of the Truth. Everything has been meticulously calculated in their heart and consciousness. The direction of travel has been clearly drawn out, and the path has been selected. The believer will face every storm which comes into their heart and say to themself, "*No, these are all wrong. If I go down this path, I will become lost and wasted everything. I will perish. That person who invited me for an hour wasted a whole hour of my life. Not only did he waste an hour of my life, but my soul diverted off the path for an hour, and now I am behind in my own duties. I must only walk on the path of faith.*" In this case, the believer will be successful.

In the book *The Conference of the Birds,* Shaykh 'Aṭṭār mentions an anecdote which summarizes the entire book. The birds of the world gather and agree to go and search for the Simorgh. They repeat with each other, *"Simorgh! Simorgh! Simorgh! We have never seen one before. Let us find one together!"* Half or more of the birds say, *"What is this nonsense. If there ever was a Simorgh, it would have been seen by now. But as no one has seen it yet, then it is nothing but a legend. Take this falsity out of your mind. We will not be joining you."* The rest of the birds pursue their journey in search of the Simorgh. They pass over a green meadow in which a spring of water flows. Several birds descend, seeking the spring and greenery, and they remain there. The other birds continue their journey. Several other birds, such as the ducks, reach the sea, marshes, and lagoons, and they fly down to them. The geese decide to land elsewhere. The vultures decide to descend upon a carcass to eat. And so was the case with other birds.

A group of birds remain flying and pay no attention to those already on the ground. However, when they feel the heat of the sun, they say to themselves that this journey is dangerous, and they are overcome with fear for their lives. They thought to themselves that if they go any further, they will end up dying. Therefore, they decide to descend to the ground.

Only thirty birds remain in the sky. These birds continue their journey until they reach the peak of Mountain Qāf, atop which, they had been informed, the Simorgh is located. They ascended to the top of the mountain and began searching for the Simorgh. They looked left and right, and then they suddenly realized that the Simorgh was none other than themselves.

This means that if you desire to find God, you must find your "self" first. Our problem is that we have forgotten ourselves. We have not discovered who we are. We did not seek the knowledge of the "self" (*nafs*) to discover who we truly are. We sought external sciences. People become doctors, physicians, chemists, engineers, scholars, exegetes, scholars of hadith, jurists, etc. All of this is done devoid of *ʿirfān*. We have not gone to discover and find ourselves to understand who we are. It is only after one discovers one's "self" and is no longer in need of further discovery that one should seek external sciences.

The following hadith is one of the most precious expressions and has astonishing and marvelous meanings:

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فقدْ عَرَفَ رَبّه

He who knows himself, knows his Lord.[13]

One must search for God within their own self, for it is within the human being that the secret of God lies. There is an eternal

"withness" (*ma'iyya*) that God has with the essence of the human being:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ

He is with you wheresoever you are, and God sees whatsoever you do. [57:4]

Therefore, one must seek to discover one's "self" in order to discover God. The Simorgh does not exist outside of us. This is why it has never been seen, and the birds in the anecdote had not seen it either. Its form cannot be visualized. However, its reality is *thirty birds*. One must traverse the levels of desires (*shahawāt*), heedlessness (*ghafalāt*), springs, water bodies, marshes, lagoons, and carcasses to finally arrive at the level/station of Simorgh and find it. This is a metaphor expressing the necessity for humans to have high aspirations, like those thirty birds, and not to be deceived by the springs, water, etc.

The aforementioned anecdote mentions a group of pigeons. Pigeons usually behave like each other. However, in the anecdote, only a number of pigeons descend, while the others continue their journey and are not deceived. This is in allusion to humans being deceived by social status, recognition, pleasing others, etc. The remaining pigeons continued their

journey in search of the Simorgh until they eventually found it. They said to themselves, *"Until when will we remain in our state of ignorance?"* They continued their journey, not caring about the severity of the sun's heat, and they eventually reached their goal.

This is a very beautiful anecdote and personifies many exalted and wonderful meanings for humankind.

The hadith, *He who knows himself knows his Lord,* is, in logical terms, a contraposition (*ʿaks al-naqīḍ*)[14] of the following verse:

نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنسَاهُمْ أَنفُسَهُمْ

... they forgot God, and thus He made them forget their souls.

[59:19]

This means that if a person does not forget their "self" and is constantly attentive to and aware of it to the extent of discovering its intricacies, then they would be in a constant state of remembrance of God and seeking to encounter God and know Him. Thus, knowing God is predicated about knowing one's self. The purpose of everything in the *sharīʿa* is to engrain and instill this truth in human beings, so that it becomes realized and actualized in them. It all boils down to purifying the human being. This is why it is said that every action which is performed for God will be accepted. What is meant by *'for God'*

in this statement is that the act must be devoid of any non-Godly aim or intention as well as any deficiency or hypocrisy. It must be done purely for God so that it can purify the human being and take them to the Simorgh.

Prayer must be performed with the intent of purifying the self. God is capable of granting wealth to all the poor individuals in the world. However, He commands people to work, sweat, and pay charity and alms in order to purify them. Paying the *khums* tax is for purifying the self. Humans are attached to money, and by giving it in the way of God they become purified. God is also capable of repealing the recommendation of praying at night and spending the night in vigil. However, God commanded it even though getting up at night, especially in the cold winters, to perform ritual ablution (*wuḍū*) and pray to Him is difficult. It is all done in order to purify the human being by removing all impurities and contaminations from the self. Consequently, the reality and truth of all of these matters will be revealed to the individual. Things which they thought were mere imaginings and fantasies, such as the Resurrection (*qiyāma*), encountering God (*liqā' Allā*), and other spiritual and metaphysical realities, will all be revealed to be true.

Chapter 3

The Necessity of Concealing Divine Secrets

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ علىٰ محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطّيّبينَ الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ علىٰ أعدائهم أجمَعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

One of the issues that is of grave importance in spiritual wayfaring, and that the scholars of ethics have constantly instructed their students to observe throughout the whole journey, is the concealment of secrets.

The noun "secret" contrasts with "apparent." A secret matter is that which is hidden and not revealed. A "hidden matter," in terms of spiritual wayfaring, would be any Divine matter, a certain spiritual state, or something which God has not revealed to anyone except this one individual. Revealing it to others is forbidden, and one must keep these secrets to oneself.

The levels of concealment of secrets

Secrets vary from one [spiritual] level and station to another. For example, a person at the nominal levels will possess a nominal level of faith, piety, and Islam. Thus, when they sit with the believers and Muslims, they can profess that they are a Muslim, a believer, a pious individual, and a follower of Imam Ali [p]. However, if they are in certain Sunni circles, they might not be able to profess their following of Imam Ali [p], as Sunnis view this matter differently. Furthermore, if a person comes to a certain realization and receives some degree of illumination, they do not have the right to inform others, even though they may be believers and people of piety. The reason for this is that it is a divine gift granted specifically to that person. Revealing it to others will lead to very negative consequences. However, there is no problem if a person reveals it to those who are equal to them in level and degree, because revealing it in such a case would not be considered exposing a secret, as they are familiar with these realities because of their own experience and comprehension of it.

Advancing further on the path will result in the achievement of higher stations. Thus, loftier truths and secrets will be revealed to this individual. As the wayfarer advances, there will be fewer and fewer individuals with whom they can

share these matters. Revealing these matters to such individuals is not problematic.

One will keep progressing until one reaches the sanctuary of God (*Ḥaram ʾAllā*) and the station of encountering (*liqā*) and uniting (*wasl*) with God, thus entering the refuge of Divine security (*ʾamn*) and sanctuary/protection (*ʾamān*). At this point, one is not permitted to reveal any secret to any being outside the Sacred Essence (*al-dhāt al-muqaddasa*), as it is regarded as a sanctuary, and the person's inner secrets on this level are kept within the Divine Essence of the True. At this station lies the sanctity of the Truth's Divine Essence. One should not dare utter a single word there, as speech would be considered a form of revelation and exposition. This station is a sanctuary, not the station of revealing and exposing, nor the place for uttering anything. It is the world of the essence, and it is only It that witnesses Itself.

Revealing a secret makes a person susceptible to God's resentment and they will lose God's love. The sanctuary is a level of peace, the path, and of love. It is impossible to traverse this path without love, and the symbol and slogan of love is the concealment of the secrets found within the sanctuary and never revealing them to anyone outside of it.

If we look at “metaphorical love” (*ʿishq majāzī*)[15], we see that the matter is similar. If a lover reveals a secret that is between the lover and the beloved, it would be considered the gravest sin that could be committed. No sin can be compared with this.

كلُّ ذنبٍ لكَ مغفورٌ سوى الإعراضُ عنّي

“I can forgive your every sin, save your neglect of me.”[16]

Revealing a lover’s secret to others neglects the bond, unity, love, affection, intimacy, and oneness that exists between lovers, and this is an unforgivable sin. God is also jealous. There is a hadith narrated from the Prophet [p] in which he says:

إنّ سَعْدا لغيورٌ وَأنا أغيَرُ مِنْ سَعْد وَاللهُ أغيَرُ مِنّي، وَمِنْ غيرَتِهِ حَرّمَ الفواحِشَ ما ظهَرَ مِنْها وَما بَطنَ.

“Indeed, Saʿd is very ghayūr (protective), and I am more ghayūr than he is, and the Supreme Allah is more ghayūr than I am. It is a result of his ghīra that He hath prohibited indecencies, whether inward or outward.” [7:33]17

“Indecencies” in this context refer to any act or deed that is deemed indecent and should not be shown/expressed outwardly. “Inward and outward” refers to the fact that God has *ghīra*, i.e., indecent, and bad acts abhor Him and thus He conceals and hides them. Therefore, God conceals that which must be concealed, and this is a result of His jealousy.

Consequently, if a secret exists between a servant and God which is associated with the relationship that exists between them, the Divine jealousy will neither find it acceptable nor be pleased with it, and thus will distance the person and banish them.

The vilest consequence of exposing a secret is *ìstidrāj*[18]

The destitute individual who has been banished by God will be become prone to the greatest tribulation: gradual Divine deception (*ìstidrāj*). That is, they will slowly, incrementally, and subtly decline to the level of the lowest of the low. God will say to them, "*I revealed a secret to you because of the unique relationship that we shared together. You then exposed our secret, which no one should have known about, and revealed it to others. Your heart and conscience were clearly aware that it was a secret.*" This, of course, does not apply to revealing secrets to those who are on the same level as the individual, as they are not considered to be "others," and hence, the concept of "otherness" does not apply here. As for those who reveal and expose a secret to "others" who are not on the same level, they will gradually be drawn by God into a descent until they reach the lowest of levels. This is the greatest tribulation and calamity that can befall a person. A person who is plummeting will realize that they are falling, and thus will recognize their sins and mistakes and, consequently, attempt to repent and seek

forgiveness from God. However, a person who falls gradually and is pulled down subtly remains unaware of their calamity and descent until they reach the bottom.

A person experiences varying states during their spiritual wayfaring, meaning that every state and level has a specific experience to be surpassed and transcended. Every level and station which a person passes has its own special state, attentiveness, sincerity, and purity. A person may experience a state of *khilsa* and experience a special type of attentiveness towards God and a repulsion from anything other than God. The heart will be connected to God, and love for God is experienced. Imam Ali [p] said:

واجْعَلْ قلبي بِحُبّكَ مُتَيَّما.

"And make my heart enthralled by Your love."[19]

He asked God to make his heart captivated, mesmerized, enthralled, and filled with His love. This is one of the [spiritual] states a person may experience, and such a state will bring about certain conceptualizations along with it. A person who reveals secrets following the experience of a specific state and becoming aware of its peculiarities will be subjected to God's *ìstidrāj* and will slowly and incrementally have their state stripped away from them. However, the conceptualizations will remain because the fall is gradual and very subtle. This is why a

person may falsely continue believing that they still possess the special experiences and effects which resulted from reaching those states. The conceptualizations remain in their mind, even though they lose the ability to experience the state. All that remains are mere conceptualizations and false imagination. Thus, the foundation is the actual state which they were experiencing, i.e., sincerity, attraction to God, repulsion of the world, love of God, etc. Slowly, the relationship between them and God begins to lose its warmth and intensity. They will then begin building relationships and spending time with others and, God forbid, even begin committing sins, turning away from wanting to encounter God, and even belittling God's sanctity. They will criticize mysticism and say, "*Mysticism is nothing but gatherings in which superficial love is expressed. They are nightly gatherings that have no reality to them. Mysticism is nothing but mere emotions and artificial warmth and intensity.*"

Consequently, one's heart becomes chained to the world, and as they gained a little from their spiritual wayfaring, they begin to use whatever was gained for their own selfish and worldly purposes. They received power from God but then turns around and uses it in the path of Satan. The conceptualizations which remain with them make them imagine that they are a Godly saint or a mystic. They believe that they have attained all this through visions and spiritual experiences, when in truth they are empty-handed, and everything once gained has been

stripped away from them. They continue to be joyful for the presence of mental images and conceptualizations which remain as residue from previously experienced states. This is how they will be until they reach the moment of death at which time God will say to them, *"Why did you reveal my secret to others?"*

The negative consequences of revealing secrets

Revealing secrets to others has many detrimental effects, including:

1. Shutting the door in the face of others

God will say to such person, *"You are not the only creature I have. Everyone is a creature of mine, and you exposed and revealed my secret to others and have thus blocked their paths. You knew that this matter was a secret and that others could not handle, tolerate, or comprehend it. Revealing this secret to them has led to their destabilization and weakening. They will reject it, and their relationship with religion will turn cold and weak. Their relationship with Me will also become weaker. You cut them off from any chance of walking on the path to Me."*

One can notice that when an individual reveals a secret to others, such as a certain spiritual state they experienced or a

vision, dream, or spiritual gift (*karāma*) they were granted, and then the people reject it, a negative environment results in the gathering. The reason for this is that the matter was put in the wrong place, and thus, an opposite and negative outcome was experienced by others who could not handle it. It also leads to the closing of the door to the path to God on them.

If you experience perfection, then keep it for yourself. What do you want from others? God says, "*These creatures are My servants, and one day they may become like you. Your duty is to take their hands and slowly bring them toward the path, not to instantaneously and recklessly reveal secrets to them and give them a burden of truths and subtle meanings which are beyond their capability and capacity to comprehend and carry.*"

Imam al-Sadiq [p] said to ʿAbd ʾal-ʿAzīz ʾal-Qarāṭīsī:

يا عبد العزيز! إنَّ الإيمانَ عَشْرُ دَرَجاتٍ بِمَنزِلَةِ السُلَّمِ، يُصْعَدُ مِنهُ مِرْقاةً بَعدَ مِرْقاةٍ

"O ʿAbd ʾal-ʿAzīz, certainly faith is ten levels, like the rungs of a ladder, where each rung is climbed one after the other."[20]

A person cannot elevate themself to the top in one instance. Moreover, one cannot climb more than two or three rungs at a time. Thus, when a person wishes to add to someone else's faith, they cannot give everything to that person at once. It

should be given gradually; otherwise, the individual will break. Whoever tries to lift a person without climbing the ladder will drop them and break their bones.

The Imam [p] says that you must put back together whoever's bones you have broken.[21] You have misguided this poor soul and made them carry a burden they cannot handle. You have overburdened their capacity and thus broken them. Now you are responsible for their spiritual compensation (*diyya*).

Therefore, one must take the hands of people calmly and gradually elevate them. Once they learn a matter and comprehend it properly, you can take them to the next step, and so on and so forth. Matters are to be revealed one at a time. The varying levels and degrees of faith are similar to food consumption: One must first digest what they have eaten before putting something else in their mouth or risk suffering from indigestion and eventually ruin. However, if one properly understands a matter and digests it correctly, one will be able to understand and comprehend other matters, be they theoretical or practical matters. Thus, comprehending an advanced matter is preconditioned upon understanding its predecessor.

All this goes back to concealing secrets. Secrets must thus be concealed and preserved within one's self. A person must

interact and live among others on the basis of being considerate and steadily taking them on the path.

2. Being afflicted with self-conceit (ʿ*ujub*)

Revealing secrets which God has gifted an individual can lead to self-conceit, as the person has not yet crossed the "realm of the self" (ʿ*ālam al-nafs*). That person is still travelling on the path to God's sanctuary. If they are connected to God's sanctuary, then everything they do is an act of God and not one of the self. However, so long as the self has not been transcended, any revelation of one's states or visions will lead to the self inevitably feeling conceit and vanity. Therefore, one must safeguard themself against the ploys of oneself.

Even though an individual may have acquired certain perfections, the perfections are, however, granted by God. Perfections given by God must be spent and used in the path of God. If a person acquires perfection from their own self, then they have the right to do with them anything they wish. However, it is God Who grants perfections, so they must not be revealed or exposed to others. As long as a person has not reached the level of self-purity (*ṭahāra*), they will be prone to self-conceit. Self-conceit means magnifying the self. A person who is afflicted with self-conceit sees things through his self and, thus, magnifies it. It is a great danger because the path of

ʿ*irfān* is contrary to self-conceit. Spiritual wayfaring is the path of constantly weakening the self. One must see themself as nothing and God as everything. At the beginning, one falsely imagines themself to be something impressive. They see themself as a possessor of knowledge (*ʿālim*), powerful (*qādir*), alive (*ḥayy*), aware (*mudrik*), and a doer (*faʿʿāl*). They attribute knowledge and actions to themself, saying, "This is *my* knowledge," "This is *my* action," "This is *mine*," "So-and-so has belittled *me*," etc. It is all about the "I." Once an individual begins their journey in spiritual wayfaring, they begin to realize how deceived they were. Everything the individual has uttered is unacceptable. What is the meaning of "I," and what value does it have? A person is incapable of preventing a fly from disturbing them and can have a heart attack at any moment. The tongue with which one can speak, the ability to think and move, and the energy which one possesses will all end up as an inert corpse, which will quickly be buried because it will rot and become putrid. If these perfections were truly ours, then technically we should never lose them. Thus, it is God who grants us these perfections and can take them away just as He has given them. Once we realize that they are all from God, they become valuable. However, imagining them to be from our self is incorrect and in accordance with the paths of Satan and the

Pharaohs. From this, we understand the dangers of revealing secrets and that it leads to an increase in self-conceit.

Self-conceit is to magnify and beautify the self and ego; to be self-absorbed and boast about one's ego; to view one's self as magnificent. The fact is that the human being is nothing, so how can one see themselves as something? The Messenger of God is the greatest of all creatures, yet God orders him in the Quran to say:

قُل لا أمْلِكُ لِنَفْسِي نَفْعًا وَلا ضَرًا.

Say, "I have no power over what benefit or harm may come to me." [7:188]

وَلا يَمْلِكُونَ لأنفسِهِمْ ضَرًا وَلا نَفْعًا وَلا يَمْلِكُونَ مَوْتًا وَلا حَيَاةً وَلا نُشُورًا.

...who have no power over what harm or benefit may come to themselves, and who have no power over death, or life, or resurrection. [25:3]

This is indeed how it is, and it is why we view the imams and prophets, especially the noble Messenger, as, while possessing the loftiest of spiritual stations, free of self-conceit. Not a single word of pride is uttered by them, nor has anything of that nature been narrated about them. On the contrary, we see them repeatedly referring to themselves as, *"the weak servants of God,"* and saying, *"I have no power over what benefit or harm may come to me,"* and so on.

Imam al-Baqir [p] was once accompanied by Imam al-Sadiq [p] on his way to the Levant, where ʿAbd al-Malik b. Marwān had summoned them. On their way, they met a Christian, and a lengthy conversation occurred between them. The Christian asked the Imam, *"Are you of the scholars of this nation (ʿulamāʾ) or of its ignorant ones (juhhāl)?"* The Imam replied, *"I am not of its ignorant ones."*[22] He did not say that he was an *ʿālim* (knowledgeable one/scholar) of this nation, even though he truly occupied the status of teaching and mentoring. Thus, even if one reaches the rank of Imam al-Baqir [p], one must not imagine themself to be a scholar, God forbid. Rather, the knowledge a person possesses comes to them through God. A person may wake up in the morning not knowing anything anymore.

There was a famous scholar who became afflicted with forgetfulness toward the end of his life. He was incapable of telling his right from his left. Whenever he visited the shrine in Najaf, he would not know how to return home. He would use charcoal or plaster to draw marks on the walls to guide himself back home, yet he often still lost his way. He had been a top tier scholar! There are many other incidents which people narrate regarding scholars who were afflicted with forgetfulness in their lives. In another incident, it is narrated that an individual was once in al-Sahla Mosque and was invited to lunch by one of the

servants there. The servant brought him a lunch comprised of dates, honey, and yogurt. This individual would place one finger in the honey, for example, and instead of placing this finger in his mouth, he would put his other finger in it. This is truly shocking. A person can reach a point of forgetting things that were engrained and imprinted in their mind to the extent of placing their finger in their mouth without realizing that it has no flavor. One can conclude from this that even though a person may have been a scholar, author, teacher, famous person, etc., one can lose all these things.

Question: Can it be said that this is God? Yes, this is God; this is God.

Humans must not become proud when their true nature is of this sort. Becoming infatuated with one's ego is the pillar of Satan's actions. It means that one no longer sees God, but rather sees oneself. This is why the Quran informs us that Satan said to God [after refusing to prostrate to Adam]:

أَنَا خَيْرٌ مِنْهُ خَلَقْتَنِي مِن نَارٍ وَخَلَقْتَهُ مِن طِينٍ.

I am better than he. Thou hast created me from fire, while Thou hast created him from clay. [7:12]

Satan said, "*I am better than he*"." Notice how the "I" precedes his claim. He did not say, "*He* is less than me," but rather, "*I* am better."

3. Failure to reach the goal

Another consequence of revealing secrets is the inability to reach one's goal and destination. One who wishes to reach their goal must conceal it from others. The Prophet [p] says:

اُسْتُرْ ذَهَبَكَ وذهابَكَ ومَذْهَبَكَ.

'Conceal your gold, your excursions, and your creed.'

The Prophet commands us to hide our money and gold, our faith and creed, and our journeys, trips, paths, and the methods we employ in our lives from others. Gold symbolizes the capital of life, and thus one is commanded to conceal and preserve it, because a thief is always ready to steal it. A thief is not the only one who steals money. There are also thieves who steal the faith of a human being, and there are others who rob one's soul and creed. They steal one's tranquility and calmness.

Some creatures, be they human or not, are envious of others. Their treacherous souls begin to influence and impact humans during the middle of the night. Gabriel once came to the Messenger of God [p] and said, *"O Messenger of God, one of the demons of the jinns is plotting something against you. If you retreat to your bed, recite the Verse of the Throne (āyat al-Kursī), so that you remain under God's protection and the demon will not be able to inflict any harm on you."*[23] In other

words, the Prophet is commanded to submit his soul to God, even in his sleep. Otherwise, there are devils, demons, and jinns who wish to inflict harm on him.

چون که اسرارت نهان در دل شود
زان مـرادت زودتر حاصل شود

For if a soul entombs its secret love
Fulfillment comes more quickly from above.[24]

This poem alludes to the fact that if a seedling is placed under the ground, it will begin to germinate and gradually grow roots and sprout and eventually become a plant or tree. However, if it is placed on top of the ground, a bird will eat it, leaving no trace of it.

Thus, a person must preserve and hide secrets so that their ambition does not turn cold. This is similar to placing lit charcoal under ashes during winter so that they last longer. If the coals were exposed to the cold winds, they would quickly burn up and be consumed. When covered with ash, however, it stays longer and provides heat for a whole day. The same applies to the human being whose reality is related to and connected with the heart. The value and worthiness of a human being is related to their heart, not to their body or wealth, nor is it related to their imaginings and whims. It is connected to a true reality which is the pivot of their spiritual realizations and

perceptions. God created the heart for Himself and made it the place in which He manifests. God says:

لا يَسَعُني أرْضي وَلا سَمَائي ولَكِن يَسَعُني قلبُ عَبْدِيَ المُؤْمِن.

Neither My Earth nor Heaven can encompass Me, but that which can is the heart of My believing servant.[25]

4. What is to be concealed

a) The states which a person experiences

Concealing secrets must occur on two levels.

The first level involves the states in which something is revealed to the individual. An example of this would be having a good dream during sleep. A person must not reveal this to anyone, including family members or even parents. Of course, this applies only when they are not at the individual's same level; otherwise, it is allowed. If a person dreams about their mother, for example, they must not speak about it to others unless it is a regular dream. If it was a spiritual dream, however, for example, one that is very lucid, then the dreamer must not inform their mother about it. Regular dreams are not secrets, because regular people also have dreams of this sort and talk to each other about them.

Other dreams, however, are secrets. For example, one might see the noble Prophet [p] hugging them, kissing them, and then handing them an emerald ring and saying to them, "*O Child! This is the station which you will reach.*" This dream is a secret, because the Prophet, the hugging, and referring to the person as his son, and the emerald ring all symbolize something. If someone else comes to know about this dream and does not properly comprehend it, they will block the dreamer's path and become like those demons who plotted against the prophet (p). Their souls plot against others as the Quran says:

مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ.

Of the jinn and of mankind. [114:6]

The evil and disbelieving spirits among the jinn and the human beings try to cause trouble by preventing an individual from pursuing the path. Evil and disbelieving human beings might be worse than jinn because the human soul is stronger than that of the jinn, because jinn are existentially inferior to and weaker than human beings. Jinn are neither from the angelic realm (*ʿĀlam al-Malakūt*), nor from the realm of spiritual entities (*ʿĀlam al-Rūḥāniyyāt*); they are from the realm of fire (*ʿĀlam al-Nār*). The essence of a jinn is composed of smoke and fire, and a jinn is existentially inferior to a human being. According to the

Quran, jinn can be either believers or disbelievers. The believers among the jinn do not harm human beings, but they remain weak, and one must not engage with them nor associate with them. If a person associates with the weak beings among the jinn, their weakness will transfer to that person.

Therefore, if a person sees a vision (*mukāshafa*) in which their deceased mother is sitting before them and speaking with them, and the seer has no doubt that who they see is their mother or that she is truly in front of them, it is regarded as truly a vision. Things that we see and witness in our dreams could also become visible to and be seen by the wayfarer while awake. It is all in God's hands. One may reach a level of seeing an Imam. These visions are referred to as *mukāshafa*.

After passing these states, a person is granted the *tawḥīdī* state. Suppose that during your worship, after performing one or more *forty-day programs*, after enduring many difficulties and combatting your self with sincerity, you see, during your prayer or outside of it, marvelous lights. These lights first are very dim, but slowly and gradually they begin to increase until they reach the intensity of the sun. All this occurs while a person is awake. A matter like this should not be told to anyone.

Suppose that the reality of *tawḥīd* is revealed to you. Suddenly, you realize that all powers in this world are but a single power. You see that the power and strength that is in the tree, mountain, human being, and all creatures in existence are but a single power, and that its reality is God.

One may also see that the knowledge which is found in all creation is only one. This is what they refer to as "the unity of the Names" (*tawḥīd ʾasmāʾī*). You see all actions and movements as a single act; this is what is referred to as "the unity of actions" (*tawḥīd ʾafʿālī*). Thus, one would realize that the acts of every individual are enfolded in God's acts, and all are subjugated to Him. All acts fall under the only true and divine will of God. There is only one Master in this world Who possesses knowledge and power, and that is the sacred Divine Essence. There is but one master and one lord. "*My Lord, I have no Lord but You in all of existence.*" This is the meaning of the following phrase which is recited in one of the whispered prayers (*munājāt*):

اللهُمَّ مَوْلايَ يا مَوْلايَ.

'O Lord, my Master, O my Master!'

Therefore, a person should not, in any way or form, reveal these aforementioned matters, for it is crossing over into the realm of *tawḥīd* which, by nature, is a secret. If this secret is revealed, then the person will perish.

In summary, if a person wishes to speak about some esoteric truth or reality, they must relate a narration from the Imams which conveys their intended meaning. For example, one should say, *"Imam al-Baqir [p] said such-and-such in a specific narration, which can be found in such-and-such book."* One must not say something like, *"My inner soul connected with Imam al-Baqir [p], and hence, I understood this specific truth;"* nor should a person say, *"The Imam instilled this meaning in my heart, and now I am revealing it to you."* This is all incorrect, and whoever utters things of this sort is naïve and simpleminded.

People must deal and interact with others in accordance with their acceptable norms and customs. It is possible for a person to reach a state in which they connect with the inner secret/soul of Imam al-Sadiq [p]. The Imam's secret is present in the world of existence, and, by God, he [p] is alive without a shadow of doubt. This could occur in a way similar to how we are able to lift and remove physical veils and barriers. For example, a person may visit the home of another individual and, after knocking at the door, the barrier (the door in this case) is removed by its being opened. Similarly, the

passing of yesterday and the coming of today, in which I came to visit you, is also a barrier that was removed. God is capable of lifting these physical and temporal barriers, allowing a person to connect with Imam al-Sadiq or Imam al-Baqir [p]. Should a person be granted success in connecting with them, then such person should not be afflicted with pride or self-conceit; nor should they inform anyone about it. It must remain a hidden secret within themself.

Any matter that is revealed or manifested to an individual must be preserved for themself, regardless of whether the vision was true or not, correct, or incorrect. It is possible at times for visions to be incorrect or not to correspond with reality. Therefore, one should not act upon them until they present the vision to their master. One's master is the only one capable of comprehending and understanding it, and only the master can discern correct from incorrect visions. A person cannot do that on their own.

b) Spiritual programs and instructions

Something else which must be concealed and kept secret are the instructions and commands given by the master to the student. For example, if the master instructs the student to pray the *nawāfil* or perform the Friday *ghusl*, or if the master commands his student to recite *du'ā' kumayl* every Thursday night, or to perform *ṣalāt al-layl*, fast specific days, or invoke *'la*

ĩlāha ĩlla Allā' a thousand times, the student should not mention these to anyone else. If someone walks up to a person who is seated performing *dhikr* and asks them, *"Which dhikr are you reciting,"* they must say, *"I am invoking God and praying to Him."* A person should not reveal to others which dhikr they are reciting or the fact that they even receive instructions and programs from a spiritual master. These are all matters that should not be shared with others.

Spiritual wayfaring is a very intricate and delicate matter. If one person reveals something to another, the other will go and inform yet others. This will naturally have implications. People's souls differ from one another; one could look down and ridicule a wayfarer. They may criticize someone as taking their religion and creed from a certain teacher. They may criticize the individual and object by saying, *"Isn't it possible for someone to receive intuition from one's own self? Why not just read Mafatīḥ al-Jinān, or take teachings directly from the Quran? Why does one need a teacher and master?"*

For this reason, revealing and exposing secrets is wrong and will bring harm upon the person. Another fact is that people may become attracted to the path and wish to embark upon it when they are not yet prepared for it. Not every seed that is planted will germinate. A seed must be planted in the right

season. Roses and flowers have a specific season in which they must be planted, and so do other seeds. If a seed is planted during the right time, it will grow if watered and provided suitable weather conditions. Similarly, revealing things at the wrong time will lead to destruction and loss. It will lead to weakness, and the metaphoric plant will dry out and die, and the "seed" will lose its potentiality.

Therefore, one must not mention names to anyone. The harm in this is twofold. If a person becomes famous, then many people will start flocking to them to request things and have certain expectations from them. Many of these people are not actually seeking *ʿirfān*. Rather, some want to be able to repay their debts, others want to build a house, etc. They begin demanding things such as having one's spouse brought back, or curing the sick, requesting prayers and miracles from the individual. People treat the person as if that person knows the unseen or is the Imam. A person can neither function outside the will of God nor trespass it. The following saying applies to this scenario:

المرءُ لنفسِهِ ما لمْ يُعرَفْ فإذا عُرِفَ كانَ لغيرِهِ.

A person belongs to himself so long as he is not known. However, once he is known, he will belong to others.[26]

Thus, spiritual wayfaring requires discipline and precision. One is to perform their duties without causing any commotion. If you eat or drink, say *"All thanks is due to God"* (*alḥamdu lillā*) without anyone noticing. Do not reveal to anyone that you have drunk water. Otherwise, if they come to know, they will try to pollute it so that neither you nor anyone else can drink or benefit from it anymore. Not all souls are pure and clean, and each has its own motives and objectives. Some desire to acquire the science of alchemy, and others want to be able to transform whatever they touch into gold.

One may answer very vaguely when asked about what they are doing. When someone is reciting a prayer to God, one may say they are thinking about God or directing themself towards Him without specifying the particular supplication or specific *dhikr* or *wird*. One need not mention the specific act they are performing or the nature of the relationship which ties them with a certain master. If anyone discovers that a relationship exists, then one may describe the relationship as being related to religious inquiries, as they are naturally part of the questions a scholar is asked.

Similarly, if a person's wife comes to know about the relationship between the individual and a specific master, then it is not problematic as long as the true nature of the

relationship is not known, i.e., that the relationship be shown to them to be one related to religious questions and queries.

Furthermore, if a person experiences a certain [spiritual] state, they are not to try to persuade others to go where they received their initiation and instructions. People's souls differ. What one individual seeks from spiritual wayfaring may differ from what another individual seeks. People's goals differ because of the state and nature of each person's soul. While one person has God as the ultimate objective they seek through spiritual wayfaring, another might be seeking worldly provisions and benefits.

The role of the prophets and imams is to elevate people spiritually

The path of God and gnosis (*ʿirfān*) is not a game. The Prophet and the Imams did not come to fulfill the fantasies of people and add to their ignorance.

God says in the Quran:

يُعَلِّمُهُمُ الكِتَابَ وَالحِكْمَةَ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ.

Who will teach them the Book and Wisdom, and purify them. [2:129]

The Prophet and Imams (p) teach people the Book, show them wisdom, and purify them, all to make them grow and to guide them spiritually, not physically or materialistically. They do not

bring forth food, provisions, or money for the people, for with these come troubles. They came to guide people, and it is the prophet's duty and responsibility to provide the people with the way to [spiritual] growth. While this is the case, there is the story of an individual who came to the Prophet and asked him to create a river for him, or the story of another who asked him to use his willpower to turn a mountain into gold. The polytheists of Mecca made such demands from the Prophet.

God says in the Quran:

وَقالوا لن نُؤْمِنَ لكَ حَتّى تَفجُرَ لنا مِنَ الأرْض يَنبُوعًا.

And they say, "We shall not believe in you till you make a spring gush forth for us from the earth." [17:90]

The Prophet did answer their call and fulfill their demand by making a spring gush forth for them from the earth, but here we ask, did the Prophet come to make springs gush forth from the earth for people, or was he sent to guide and make people believers? If making a spring gush forth from the earth will make people believe, the Prophet will do it, just as he split the moon in half for them and performed other miracles. However, some people will keep asking for more miracles and still remain disbelievers, because the soul/self which does not want to accept faith will dismiss any miracle it witnesses as mere "magic" and the performer of the miracle as a "magician." This

is because their hearts do not believe in God. Once the heart is sick and polluted, it will not believe. It becomes similar to those who are suffering from typhoid. If the most delicious food is brought to them, they will push it away and say that they cannot tolerate its smell, when in fact it is not the food that is bad, but rather it is the state, mood, and sense of smell of the individual that have gone bad.

Similarly, when polytheism, disbelief, and hypocrisy exist in a person's heart, they spoil everything, and once everything is spoiled, no advice or guidance will have any positive effect or impact on that person. Whenever you mention God, faith, truth, trust, etc., to them, they only understand the opposite. Again, their state becomes similar to that of the person suffering from typhoid. If the most delicious foods are brought to them, and if they are decorated in the most beautiful manner, the sick person will reject them and call the person bringing the food their enemy, claiming that they have brought them the worst and most malodorous of foods, because the sick person's sense of smell no longer functions properly.

Spiritual diseases are like physical ones. The soul becomes spoiled and so do the spiritual senses. They alter one's faculty of discernment.

It has been said that some of the prison guards during the time of the Shah in Iran derived pleasure from torturing the inmates. If a day passed without them having tortured someone, they would not be able to sleep that night. They derived pleasure and comfort from torturing people. This was the nature of their souls. However, there are other souls that cannot sleep if they witness a needle going into someone's foot and hurting them.

The actions which we perform and the actions which God commands us to perform are not mere movements or rituals meant to benefit the human body. Rather, they influence the human soul and alter it. The divine commandments, worship, servitude , the Quran, and on top of them all the worship and servitude of the Prophet, Imams, and their likes, all alter the soul and transform the wretched soul into a blessed one. This is similar to restoring a sharp knife that has been abandoned in a warehouse and has become damaged by humidity and rust. The knife is restored by first using a rough filter, and then gradually moving on to finer and more finer ones, until the knife shines like a mirror. It has been transformed from 'wretchedness' to 'blessedness,' and its potential gradually became manifest. God has granted this potential to mankind and has granted them this readiness. He has also given souls the capability of changing. The

commandments of the prophets came to take people out of darkness:

اللهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ.

"God is the Protector of those who believe. He brings them out of the darkness into the light. As for those who disbelieve, their protectors are the idols, bringing them out of the light into the darkness." [2:257]

Thus, it is necessary to conceal secrets on two levels: first, when it comes to one's [spiritual] states, journeying, visons, etc., and second, with regards to the spiritual programs and specific instructions given by the master to the student.

Chapter 4

The Necessity of Submitting Oneself to a Master

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ على محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطّيّبينَ الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ على أعدائِهِم أجمعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

The great masters and scholars of ethics (*akhlāq*) enumerate several preconditions to attempting the path of Divine gnosis, by which one must completely abide. These have been mentioned in works on ethics and in the treatises of *Kernel of the Kernel*, Sayyid Baḥr al-ʿUlūm's *Treatise on Spiritual Journeying and Wayfaring*, and Fayḍ al-Kāshānī's *Zād al-Sālik*.

A few of the most important conditions were previously mentioned, one of which was having high aspirations. This can be summarized as the need for the wayfarer to have God as their only goal. One must not be taken in by anything else, including spiritual visions or stations. Paying attention to these things is considered to be deserting God. Thus, a person must work only for God, and if God grants that person anything along the way, then it is a blessing from Him.

The second precondition is steadfastness (*ʾistiqāma*), patience (*sabr*), and persistence (*muthābara*). A person must never lose hope. One must not escape the battlefield when confronted by trials and tribulations. One must possess patience and tolerance until they reach the goal.

A third precondition is to conceal secrets (*kitmān ʾal-sirr*), meaning that if a person experiences a spiritual state, such state must not be revealed to anyone, for God sees the person's inner soul; therefore, there is no need to reveal the state to someone who does not have the readiness to hear or comprehend it. Revealing one's state to others is exposing a secret, and God detests that. Therefore, one must conceal secrets when it comes to matters like these.

Obedience is surrender to God's Will

The fourth matter is obedience (*ʾal-ṭāʿa*). A person's soul must be obedient in the sense that it must not express its own opinions. We have a Quran, the prophetic *sunnah*, and specific guidelines, and we must move and act in accordance with them. We must obey God if He commands us to pray, regardless of where we might be. Similarly, if the *sunnah* of the Prophet dictates that we recite the prayers of *al-maghrib* and *al-ʾishāʾ*

aloud, then it is our duty to obey and recite them aloud. One cannot object, as some Sufi groups have, or consider this act to be showing off (*riyā*), and thus decide to ignore it. We must obey the Prophet when he orders us to recite the prayers aloud, even if it is indeed *riyā*', for it being as such is not our concern. If the legislator is the one who legislated and commanded this act, then he might desire for *riyā*' to be expressed in this situation. Moreover, the legislator commands the reciter of *'adhān* to ascend the minaret and recite *"I bear witness that there is no God but God"* (*'ash-hadu 'an lā 'ilāha 'illā 'Allā*) so that everyone can hear it. He is to wake up at night and walk up to the minaret, recite in a loud voice so that everyone can hear, calling upon people to awaken from their sleep. During *Hajj*, one is commanded to uncover one's head, reveal parts of their legs, perform *ghusl* for *'iḥrām*, circumambulate the Ka'ba before everyone's eyes, and to project oneself in these acts. These acts are, in and of themselves, a form of projecting oneself, yet they please God. It is also incorrect for one to refuse to cut their hair after *Hajj* for fear of people knowing that they went to Hajj, and so on and so forth.

Therefore, obedience is an essential matter. God sent messengers to people and commanded they and the *sharīʿa* with which they were sent be obeyed.

God says in the Quran:

يا أيُّهَا الذينَ آمَنُوا أطِيعُوا اللهَ وَأطِيعُوا الرَّسُولَ وَأولِي الأمْرِ مِنكُمْ.

'O you who believe! Obey God and obey the Messenger and those in authority among you. [4:59]

This verse commands the believers to obey God and obey His Messenger. Obey God by following the Quranic verses and obey the Messenger by listening to everything he says. However, deciding to obey the Quran but disregarding the words of the Prophet, claiming that they are his own opinions and *ijtihād*, entails a confrontation with the Prophet and a rejection of his prophecy.

Moreover, the verse also mentions "*those in authority among you*" as those who must be obeyed. Thus, we must also obey the Imams in addition to God and His Messenger. The Imams are those in authority and are the manifestations of *walāya*, *imāmā*, and the *Truth* (*ḥaqīqa*). We must follow every path to which they guide us.

In more than five instances in the Surah "The Poets" (*al-Shuʿarā*), prophets, including Lot, Noah, and Jethro, called upon their people with the following:

فاتقوا الله وأطيعون

So, revere God and obey me. [26:108]

In other words, merely claiming to obey God is insufficient. One must also follow the *sunnah* and teachings of the prophets.

The meaning of obedience

Obedience means to withdraw from your own will and act in accordance with the will of God. If God orders someone to wage war, make peace, get married, etc. then one must obey Him. Similarly, if He prohibits something, then one must not do it. Thus, if God commands a person to live in a certain area of the world, or to migrate, or to die at war, then His command must be obeyed.

This is obviously a challenging matter, because the human being desires to do what coincides with their own will and wants. Every person wishes to be free and have the ability to make their own choices.

The importance and necessity of obedience

Prophets take away one's personal freedom of choice and take them on the path of spiritual nourishment. Thus, if a person does not obey the prophet, they will remain like a wild tree that does not bear fruit, even if it lives for a thousand years. An orchardist must prune it, care for it, etc., until it can bear fruit. The tree itself is not pleased with its branches being pruned, etc., because it causes stress. Therefore, an orchardist must take on the responsibility of properly caring for the tree, so that it will bear fruit and reach its perfection. This is also the case for human beings.

Suppose that an ill person goes to a doctor with complaints of feeling tired, nauseous, and having a stomachache. Upon examination, however, the doctor informs the patient that the pain is in fact from their heart and orders the patient to go immediately to the hospital to have the heart examined. If this person refuses to listen to the doctor, then there is no point in anything after that. This person must listen to the doctor, go to the hospital, and do what they are told to do there. Their heart must be examined, x-rays must be taken, and the patient will have to be put in a secluded room for a few days, allowed no visitations and unable to speak with anyone. They will also be given food through an IV, injected multiple times a week, and given a number of pills to take on a daily basis. This person should not object and say that they were a

lecturer who would speak for hours on the pulpit, and thus not accept the doctor's orders to remain silent and sit isolated in a room. Nor should they say that they were previously enjoying whole meals and thus refuse to be fed through an IV. Now that they have been ordered to remain in the hospital bed and not move, they cannot object by saying that they used to go to the gym and lift weights, so they should not be asked not to move from their place, and so on and so forth.

By interfering with the instructions of the doctor this person would only hurt and harm themself. The doctor puts all their efforts into trying to help this person. They are specialized in their field, and the patient is considered ignorant in relation to the doctor. An ignorant individual must seek help from the learned ones.[27] This is a self-evident matter. If a person is sick and is not a doctor, then it is obligatory for that person to go to someone who is specialized in the specific disease from which they are suffering. Naturally, the doctor must also have enough experience in treating these ailments and be recognized in their practice.

Undoubtedly, a person's health will gradually improve when they act in accordance with the doctor's instructions, and they may reach perfection in this regard. Patience is necessary, as treatments and hospitalizations are not pleasant. There is loneliness and isolation in a hospital. It is difficult for a person

who lives in society among other people to suddenly be ordered and expected not to speak with anyone for several weeks and prevented from eating good meals that have pleasant tastes and smells. Some treatments require surgeries which involve creating incisions in the body and cutting it open. A person might not be mentally prepared for all this, but it must be endured because it will lead to the betterment of one's health and the cure of ailments and diseases. Therefore, a rational person will submit themself to the doctor. They are mistaken for interfering with the doctor's instructions and teachings because they are ignorant of the truth of the matter. We are ignorant, in every sense of the word, compared to the doctor's knowledge. Similar is the case of a spiritual guide (*ʿārif*); we must obey the guide and implement their instructions. If we do, we will benefit, but if we have any doubts then we will bring about our own destruction.

The necessity of referring to experts in both worldly and spiritual matters

This principle is universal and applies to every matter, be it spiritual or non-spiritual. One must resort to an architect if one wants to build. If one decides to interfere in the work of the architect, then the foundations of the house will collapse.

Therefore, one must not interfere in the work of a specialist who invests their time, effort, and expertise in their job.

Consequently, we are ignorant in everything except that which we have learned, and there is no shame in this. A person must resort to and refer to experts in things in which they are not an expert. Doing so is in accordance with the teachings of the Quran, which states:

فاسْألوا أهْلَ الذِكْر إن كُنتُمْ لا تَعْلمُون.

Ask the people of knowledge if you know not. [16:43]

One must ask people of knowledge and expertise about things they do not know. Laymen take their religious rulings from *mujtahids because* they are unaware of the rulings. A *mujtahid* is specialized and expert in the field of Islamic law and the extrapolation of these laws from the Quran and *sunnah*. This does not mean that the *mujtahid* is better than others or that this duty is peculiar to them. Rather, it implies that the *mujtahid* spent their life and entire being in these matters, while non-*mujtahids* spent their lives studying other sciences and becoming experts in other fields. Therefore, knowledge is reciprocated in society, and God rewards everyone based on their intention.

Some benefits of the instructions of a master

1) A master's instructions make acts of worship more effective

Obedience is necessary for human beings, not only in religious matters and exoteric laws, but also with regards to ethical and spiritual teachings and guidance as well as esoteric matters. Therefore, a person claiming that only performing prayers, fasting, reciting the Quran, giving charity, etc., is sufficient for them is mistaken. The prayer which a human being performs must contain a specific quality which makes them progress and move towards perfection. Otherwise, it is possible for an individual to spend their life in prayer and the performance of other religious duties, yet not advance or progress spiritually. This is a loss for the individual, and they will undoubtedly regret not reaching any spiritual station in their lifetime, all because of their attitude which entailed treating prayers as something which one performs as a mere duty.

The spiritual and esoteric teacher guides the student to the inner reality of prayer and illuminates the path and way for them. They will instruct the individual to perform prayer with presence of heart and will show them the manner through which they can achieve this presence of heart. For example, the teacher will instruct the individual to perform the prayer in a quiet place, with no picture facing them, in a dark room with

the door closed, and will ask them to avoid performing any disliked (*makrūh*) act of prayer. The teacher will also instruct the student to put down a prayer mat and focus on the prayer, being aware that this prayer is for God and that they are speaking with God, and that the Quran is God speaking to His servant. The teacher will tell the student to contemplate whether God is answering them. Had God not answered their call to pray, the individual would never have been able to pray in the first place.

A teacher guides the individual to these teachings and makes them aware that they must pray. God is neither in need of this prayer and its repetitive movements nor of legislating it for humankind. The prayers have no benefit in and of themselves. What is required is the act which brings one closer to God, meaning that prayer must lift the veils from one's heart. One prays with the intention of *"gaining proximity and nearness to God"* (*taqarrub ʾila ʾAllā*). Proximity does not mean that one ascends to the skies or wanders in the deserts or mountains, for God has no place or location. Proximity to God is from the aspect of the journey of the self (*al-sayr al-anfusī*), knowing the self (*maʿrifat al-nafs*), and removing the veils of the self (*al-ḥujub al-nafsāniyya*) such as greed, envy, arrogance, forgetfulness, etc.

The teacher is one who comes and reveals all this to the individual. The teacher will instruct the individual on how to pray. For example, they will instruct the person to focus on the *qibla*, wear their ring in a certain fashion, always use perfume, and not to wear dark clothes. As a general rule, it is not recommended to wear colors such as black, dark gray, and brown while praying. One must wear clothes that are simple and have beautiful, light colors, such as white or yellow, for the angels like these colors and detest colors similar to black. Other matters must also be observed during prayer; for example, do not keep a dog in the house or hang a picture on the wall; otherwise, the angels will never be present. Furthermore, do not leave garbage in the house overnight; take it outside. If that is not possible, it should be covered and kept hidden. These are all actions that must be applied and followed in addition to many other things.

Thus, we cannot say that God wanted one prayer from us, and because we have fulfilled this command, nothing more is needed. The matter is not as simple as fulfilling one's duty, for it is not a game. Prayer represents a program for the perfecting of our souls. It was legislated and founded upon a real and true principle. If we pray, we will advance and move forward, but if we pray without any inner contemplation or attentiveness, even for ninety years, we will not move from our place, and every act we perform will merely be a repetition that neither helps nor

benefits. The most it will do for a person is that they will be considered to have performed their duty, but they will not reach any [spiritual] level or station. The human being entered this world blind and will depart from it blind.

God says in the Quran:

وَمَن كَانَ فِي هَٰذِهِ أَعْمَىٰ فَهُوَ فِي الْآخِرَةِ أَعْمَىٰ وَأَضَلُّ سَبِيلًا.

And whosoever was blind in this [life] will be blind in the Hereafter, and further astray from the way. [17:72]

What is meant by blindness here is not the blindness of the eye, for the Quran says:

فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَٰكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي الصُّدُورِ.

Truly it is not the eyes that go blind, but it is hearts within breasts that go blind. [22:46]

Hence, one whose eyes of the heart are blind is truly blind, and it is prayer that opens these eyes for the human being. Thus, it does not matter much if one is physically blind so long as the eye of the heart can see. It is the duty of the spiritual and ethical teacher to guide the student to this. A spiritual teacher has not limited themself to learning the rules of prayer in terms of jurisprudence and *ʾijtihād*, whereby they extrapolate and conclude that the noon prayer is composed of four units and that having doubt in the second two units of a two-unit, or

three-unit prayer renders the prayer invalid, etc. Rather, they have pursued the learning of the secrets of prayer and gained insight and knowledge about its secrets and subtleties. They have explored and become aware of the meaning of *qunūt*, prostration to the ground for the sake of God, the utterance of '*Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help*' [1:5], and the meaning of prayer itself. These are not only external realities and outward forms. In this sense, a spiritual teacher gives universal guidance in matters such as prayer, purity, fasting, pilgrimage, transactions, marriage, etc. Their duty is to teach others the secrets of all these laws and rulings, thus elevating the individual's soul so that it benefits from these outward forms of worship by realizing their inner illuminative reality.

Performing acts of worship in their outward form for a thousand years without coupling them with their esoteric reality will not assist an individual in their spiritual movement and journey. It is like someone who only wishes to benefit from the shell of a walnut without eating its kernel. The opposite is also true, for someone cannot only benefit from the kernel and discard the shell. God willed that the real benefits of the walnut will only exist if it takes this specific shape and form. The same applies to almonds and every other seed or fruit. An apple is only an apple in its specific shape and form, and it must be eaten in its specific form should a person want to benefit from it. Prayer is the same. One must seek proximity to God through

prayer by facing *qibla*, by bowing and prostrating, and by meditating on the meanings of these movements and having their realities present in one's mind and heart. Thus, a person must direct their entire being to the *kaʿbah* of God without excluding but combining their physical body with their mental (*mithālī*) attentiveness, heart, and faculty of gnosis. The presence of one's entire being will thus render a person someone who is "praying to God." This is the perfect prayer and the sanctuary [of God]. We ask God to grant us the success to pray such a prayer, for the reality of two units of prayer performed in this manner is true dialogue with God.

Therefore, God is not in the heavens, not in the east or the west or underground. God is always with us and surrounds every being in existence. He is with our essence, even before we utter a word or make a statement, for He always precedes us in everything. Imam Ali [p] said:

ما رأيتُ شيئاً إلا ورأيتُ اللهَ قبله وبعدَه ومعه.

"I saw nothing save that I saw God before it, with it, and after it."

If we pray in such a manner, we will find and witness God in our own being (*wujūd*) and in our inner secret. Prayer affords one [spiritual] insight and illumination (*nūrāniyya*), brings one closer to God, and moves one towards Him. This is

one of the results and effects of this type of knowledge which can be considered a goal in and of itself, as it is regarded as a form of knowledge.

In the past, the Islamic seminaries had great schools of knowledge and spiritual mentorship in which teachers of ethics and *mujtahids* mentored their students and guided them spiritually. Some scholars were responsible for dealing with the social aspects of people's lives, while others were responsible for teaching ethics and spirituality. In the past, there were figures such as *al-Shahīd al-ʾAwwal, al-Shahīd al-Thānī, Ibn Miskawayh, Ibn Fahd, Ibn Ṭāwūs*, the late *Sayyid Mahdī Baḥr ʾal-ʿUlūm.* In our contemporary times there were *Mullā Ḥusaynqulī Hamadānī* and his prominent students. These were all great teachers of *ʿirfān* and *ʾakhlāq* who had traversed the many levels of perfection and spiritual truths. Each one of these individuals was a prodigy of their time, unparalleled by others. Each represented a spiritual uniqueness (*qotb*) on earth, and a [spiritual] pillar (*watad*) of the pillars (*ʾawtād*).

Not everyone is seeking this station, nor does everyone have the patience and tolerance for it. This is why God gives everyone the choice of either coming to Him or not. It is up to the individual to decide. God ordains prayer upon people, but

He does not force anyone to perform it. The individual must choose to perform it. Thus, God will say that He ordained prayer and all that a human being must do is obey. Moreover, if a person wishes to perform their duty only to avoid the hellfire, then praying will also assist in achieving that and will place the individual among the "people of the right" (*ʾaṣḥāb ʾal-yamīn*). However, if a person wishes to possess insight and reach the state of 'humanness' (*ʾinsāniyya*) to become a perfect being, and thus render their God-given potentiality into full effect (*maqam al-fiʿliyya*), then that person must encounter God and know Him.

2) The spiritual instructor teaches the wayfarer how to remove spiritual veils.

God says:

عَبدي أطِعْني حتّى أجعلكَ مِثْلي.

"My servant, obey me so that I make you like Me."

In this case, the person will know God as God must be known and thus see God without a veil or through dark or colored lenses. A person wearing black lenses can still see, but everything will appear dark to them. The sun and moon will appear very dark, and light will appear to be black. They will see

oranges as being dark and grapes as being black, and so and so forth. The same goes for other colors. These are not the true colors of things, but the alteration occurs because of the veil that exists in front of the person's eyes. This veil will mask over that eternal light which reveals every existence in both its true and its external forms. This occurs through internal changes which occur to the human self. Therefore, one must cast the self aside so that it does not interfere anymore. The lenses must be removed so that a person can see the truth and reality through the scope which God has given to humankind. This Godly scope does not interfere with what the human sees. It is completely transparent and allows the individual to see everything in its true form. A person wearing a red lens cannot discern between what is red and what is white, as everything appears to them to be red. However, when a transparent lens is worn, then every color will be discernable. When greed, envy, arrogance, love of power, desires, etc. are in control of the heart, then even if a person prays, fasts, and dresses as a saint, their actions will, in fact, be veils. This also applies to those who try to justify usury through the manipulation of religious law. Whoever seeks to traverse the path to God must not do such things. In trying to manipulate religious law to justify certain actions, one is putting on a religious garment. The person remains the same on the inside with the only difference being that they now wear a religious garment on the outside. Religion

created a law forbidding usury, but this individual manipulates the law and invents a transaction which justifies the act of usury, all while putting on a religious garment.

The spiritual teacher would say that there is no difference between worshipping God in the middle of the night and being in the marketplace dealing with customers and unfamiliar people. They are all the same, and therefore, using any form of trickery or manipulation would be considered as incorrect and misguided. *ʿIrfān*, therefore, is not merely sitting on a prayer mat in a dark room and spending the night in vigil. *ʿIrfān* is in the marketplace, university, on the street, in the bus, in dealing with one's wife and children, and in one's treatment of their neighbor or how they treat the dog or cat of the house. A person must treat his wife correctly and give her what she deserves, and a person must also give the cat its rights. A person must not mistreat a servant. One should allow their servant to eat with them and should not consider their food to be superior to that of the servant. Similarly, if one has a driver, then they must sit at the same table as the driver. One must not look down on friends and belittle them, for that person is a servant like the others. Because God is He Who gives everyone a specific path and determines their movement and journey in life and thus determines that a specific person is to be a servant and gives others specific responsibilities towards them, we have

no right to see ourselves as higher than anyone else. One person's heart might be purer than ours, and that person's insight might be stronger than ours. God created people with different colors and different statuses in wealth; He made some leaders and other followers.

An example of how the Prophet [p] and Imams [p] treated others

A person must behave like Imam al-Ridha [p], who would sit down with his servants. They would all sit at the same table and eat with him, and he would really enjoy their company. This is what *ʿirfān* is.

The teacher of *ʿirfān* guides the individual to emulating Imam al-Ridha [p]. Thus, a person must take Imam [p] as their guide and role model. A person must walk on the Imam's path and not see themself as superior to anyone or deserving of a special type of respect when entering a gathering or being around others. This is all ridiculous and meaningless, for "*the path is that which the people of the path took.*"

The Prophet [p] was the greatest of all humankind, and the greatest being in the world of existence, yet he would sit and eat with his servants. Women would bring their children to him so that he would name them. They would place the

children under the Prophet's garment, and sometimes children would urinate when they were in his arms. The women would begin to scream and yell at the children, but the Prophet would say that it was not a big deal, and he would ask only for water to clean and purify his clothes.[28] He would ask the women not to yell at the children. He would wash the clothes himself and not give them to any of his wives to wash.

One day, the Prophet was walking down an alleyway when he encountered a lady who was sitting on the ground and eating. She called upon the Prophet to sit next to her. The Prophet went and sat down. She told the Prophet to eat from her food. The Prophet then took a portion and put it in his mouth. The lady then said to the Prophet, *"I would like for you to give me the portion of food that you put in your mouth so that I can eat it."* The Prophet complied and removed the portion from his mouth and gave it to her to eat.[29] What is the secret behind this type of behavior from the Prophet? Even though he is a prophet and has reached the level of perfection, he sees everything in a godly manner. He sees that this lady is a creature of God; she belongs to God and is a human being.

The lady asked the Prophet to sit next to her, which really was a simple and small request. She then asked the Prophet to eat with her, and she continued to request that he do other things. The Prophet did not shun the lady or say that

he could not grant her requests because he is a prophet and that his status mandates that he is superior to her. On the other hand, God warns the Prophet not to go near the disbelievers,[30] lest he be slightly affected by their polytheism, stubbornness, worship of idols, etc. The illuminative nature of the Prophet dictates that he sits down next to this lady, who has no supporter or assistant. She is a poor lady sitting on the street. The Prophet would thank God and say that he is the poorest of the poor[31] and that no one is as poor as he, and this is the truth. When the Prophet [p] viewed himself in relation to God, he [p] saw that he is very poor, and that God is the only one Who is rich.

Whoever claims to be rich is making a false claim, and God will show them that it is false. If a person sees themself rich in terms of physical strength, then God will show them that this is incorrect by taking their strength away. If a person becomes proud of their eyesight, way of thinking, or anything of that sort, death will eventually come and raze everything to the ground. Therefore, a person must treat their eye as a blessing and sign from God and that it belongs to Him. One must pray and ask God to grant him success in utilizing their eye on His path. One must consider their hands, heart, senses, everything as blessings from and belonging solely to God. One must view themself as poor and as a servant who must listen to their Master and say that they are under His command.

The lady in the aforementioned story asks the Prophet [p] to sit next to her, and the Prophet, being God's servant, fulfills her request. This is the station of 'servitude' (ʿ*ubūdiyya*) which we find in the follow words:

أشْهَدُ أنّ مُحَمّدا عَبْدُهُ ورَسولُهُ.

"I testify that Muhammad is His servant and messenger."

The testimony of the Prophet's servitude precedes that of him being a messenger. The station of servitude is loftier than the station of messengerhood. Thus, a person must first become a servant before being capable of becoming a messenger. As long as a person is not a servant, that person will not be worthy of carrying a [divine] message.

Servitude is the complete departure from one's ego and being, the discarding of one's personal opinions, and the abandonment of revolving around one's own thoughts. One must completely abandon one's own will and free themself from it, just as a patient does at the hospital. One must obey and listen, just as a patient obeys and listens to a doctor. If the doctor wants to inject the patient, the patient will obey, and if the doctor tells the patient not to eat, the patient will obey. If the patient objects and tells the doctor not to perform a specific treatment, the doctor will say that this decision will affect their recovery negatively. This is precisely what the station of

servitude is. It is a very high [spiritual] rank, and it is the station that the Prophet [p] experienced. This is something that one must keep in mind and comprehend. One must view the level at which the Prophet [p] was from this lens. The Prophet's realm was one in which all of his being and existence was under the supervision and vision of God. The Prophet [p] was in a constant state of dialogue with God, praying to and supplicating Him. There is no pleasure higher than this.

The Prophet did not feel any pride or superiority when the lady asked him to sit next to her. His nature was so pure and simple that he did whatever she asked him to do without hesitation. This is the station of 'servitude' which is the result of obeying God's commands.

The outcome of obedience

The Prophet [p] and Imams [p] were sent to guide us in accordance with this path. They came to elucidate for the human being that they can reach the station of *tawḥīd*; that they are a manifestation of all of God's Names and Attributes; that they are God's vicegerent and that He granted them limitless potential. Thus, a person who sacrifices and gives in the way of God will become like Salmān and Abū Dharr. There is no doubt that Salmān, Abū Dharr, Rushayd, Kumayl, al-ʾAṣbagh b. Nubāta, and Ḥabīb b. Maẓāhir did not study in a university and

were unaware of technical and scientific terms. Instead, they earned their lofty stations through obedience to the Prophet. Salmān reached a rank in which the Prophet said about him:

سلمانٌ مِنّا أهلَ البيتِ.

"Verily, Salmān is of us, the People of the House (*'Ahl 'al-Bayt*)."[32]

He earned this rank by being obedient to the Prophet [p] in everything he commanded. He performed his duties with hesitation and without adding his personal opinions in an attempt to persuade or convince the Prophet to listen to him. Omar, on the contrary, had embraced Islam but would interfere and inject his personal opinions when he spoke with the Prophet. He would object, challenge, criticize, and interpret the actions of the Prophet [p]. During the battle of Tabūk, Omar challenged the Prophet [p] and told him not to do a certain thing.[33] This is how he remained for the rest of his life, unable to depart from his ego and self. Following the Prophet [p]'s death, Omar began altering and changing the religion. For example, he removed the segment of "hasten to the best of deeds" (*ḥayya 'alā khayr al-'amal*) from the call to prayer (*'adhān*), alleging that claiming that prayer is the best of deeds will result in

people not partaking in jihad. Therefore, he omitted it, and it has remained that way until this day.[34]

Would the Prophet not have known about this and which jihad in the path of God is recommended? Is it the jihad that falls within the scope of prayers, or is it that which is without it? Should one first be a person of prayer and then a person of jihad, or vice versa? Undoubtedly, a person's essence and being must first be in a state of prayer prior to being a person of jihad. Therefore, it is prayer that is the best of deeds and not jihad. The aim of Islam is prayer. In fact, jihad is waged for prayer. Muslims wage war so that the disbelievers will pray and be brought to the divine sanctuary. They want to give them a chance to progress and perfect themselves, for:

الصَلاةُ قُرْبانُ كلِّ تَقِيّ.

"Prayer, for the God-fearing individual, is the means of seeking divine proximity."[35]

Prayer takes the human soul out of its egotistic veils and desires and into the world of intimacy and seclusion with God. This is the special characteristic of prayer. Imam al-Sadiq [p] says that there is no act or deed on earth that is greater, more beautiful, and more honorable than prayer.[36]

God says in the Quran:

وَلَذِكْرُ اللهِ أكبَرُ

but the remembrance of God is surely greater. [29:45]

The "remembrance of God" is prayer, and it is greater than everything else.

Consequently, if "hasten to the best of deeds" is to be removed from the *ʾadhān* under the pretext that it will decrease the Muslims' eagerness to perform jihad, then jihad will be removed from prayer and become mutually exclusive to its reality. This is exactly what occurred when it was removed. The Muslims were able to conquer and occupy the world, yet they failed to make humans true people of prayer.

This act is also contrary to the behavior and path of Imam Ali [p] which mandates that a person be a man of prayer prior to performing jihad. These individuals abandoned prayer and hastened to wage jihad, and they controlled the world without succeeding in making "people of prayer." This situation continues to this day.

We await the appearance of Imam al-Mahdi. He [p] will come to make humans people of prayer. He will move them internally towards God and take them to Him, making them reach this goal.

In summary, this is all the result of obedience, and it is only through obedience that Salmān reached the rank of saints

(*ʾawliyā*) and lifted the veils from his self. Through obedience, he was able to actualize all his potential and thus become a perfect man. Conversely, if a person does not walk on this path of obedience but instead chooses to follow their own whims and personal opinions, then they will remain deprived of the spiritual experiences of the heart, even if they study and reach the level of *ʾijtihād*. One must walk on the path and struggle to reach these truths.

The lessons on spiritual purity, gnosis, and ethics are the lessons of the Messenger of God [p] and are in accordance with his *sunnah*. The Prophet [p] instructed people to spend the night in worship, supplication, and prayer to God, to seclude themselves with God, and to speak to God about their internal pain and sadness. During prayer, one opens up to God about the pain in their heart, expressing their most intimate and deepest feelings.

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

'Thee we worship and from Thee we seek help.' [1:5]

This verse means that one must only seek God, and *'Allahū akbar'* means that no one has any influence over existence except God, and that God is greater than can ever be described. If God is greater than any description, then Satan should not be

given any attention, nor should he be feared, for he cannot stand in God's way, nor does he have any control over God. Therefore, the inner being of a person becomes illuminated when they utter this statement. When one invokes the name 'Allah,' a light illuminates the heart, one that is brighter than a thousand candles. Moreover, when *'Allahū akbar'* is proclaimed, the sun shines and illuminates the heavens and the earth. This is the illumination of the heart. When the heart is illuminated, Satan is rendered powerless and cannot do anything, for he is only powerful against those in the sea of forgetfulness who do not invoke God's Name, those who are overcome with self-pride, stubbornness, lying, and denial.

God says in the Quran:

وَجَحَدُوا بِهَا وَاسْتَيْقَنَتْهَا أَنفُسُهُمْ

They rejected it, though their souls were certain of it. [27:14]

Such people see the signs of God but deny them because of the darkness that is within them. Satan belongs to these individuals, not to those who ask God to send upon them the secret and reality of submission, asking Him sincerely to guide them to His path. God loves these individuals and places then under His care and supervision. He will encompass them with His Mercy and send down angels upon them to bring them joy and happiness, and thus their breasts will expand.

God says in the Quran:

أفمَن شَرَحَ اللهُ صَدْرَهُ لِلإسْلام فَهُوَ عَلى نُورٍ مِّن رَّبِّهِ

The one whose breast God has expanded for submission (Islam), follows a light from his Lord. [39:22]

The person whose breast is expanded feels no constriction, and all the Islamic teachings and truths can settle in their heart. To them, the world holds no constriction. On the contrary, their breast expands, and they have dominion over the whole world, for they can see that all creatures are connected to God. If such a person faces anything in life or in this world, they face it with mercy and compassion, without anger or severity, for everything is subject to Divine will and power. Such a person views everything through this divine vision and not through the eyes of their own self and ego. This is only because such a person has become a servant and has parted from their own being. To be a servant is to obey God, whereas those who oppose God cannot do anything, even if their voices are loud.

The outcome of forgoing obedience

Omar became a caliph, and among his many acts, he conquered Persia, and the jurisdiction of his government reached the farthest points on earth. Nonetheless, his personal opinions and suggestions remained stagnant. He would tell the Prophet [p]

how to behave and what to do. Did he really consider his intellect to be greater than the Prophet's [p]? Did he believe in the Prophet [p]'s prophecy, illumination, sanctity, and authority (*walāya*)? Did he not witness all the miracles the Prophet [p] performed? If so, then why did he insist on continuously challenging the Prophet [p] and bothering him?

People during that era bothered the Prophet until a number of Quranic verses were revealed. The Prophet felt reluctant and embarrassed to send them away. For example, the Prophet's house was composed of ten rooms, and each wife occupied one of the rooms. People would come and sit in front of the door waiting for food, and they would sit and talk for hours. The Prophet would feel reluctant to ask them to leave, for he was extremely shy. A number of Quranic verses had to be revealed to make these people understand that they could not remain there and bother the Prophet [p]. They were commanded to leave after the Prophet [p] gave them their food, and they were not to come there before the allotted time in hopes of earning an extra plate of food.

God says in the Quran:

فَإِذَا طَعِمْتُمْ فَانتَشِرُوا.

And when you have eaten, disperse. [33:53]

This verse clearly demonstrates that the people would abuse and bother the Prophet [p]. The relevant verse in its entirety contains a number of admonishments, such as the prohibition of his wives marrying after the Prophet [p] and asking anything of the Prophet's [p] wives should be done so from behind a veil. Some people would tell the Prophet [p] shocking things, such as, *"After you die, we will marry your wives."* A Quranic verse was then revealed prohibiting the Prophet's [p] wives from marrying anyone after his death.[37]

Our teacher 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was also an embodiment of shyness and modesty. Looking at him, one would see him as a reflection of the infallibles [p], completely immersed in modesty and nobility. Every time I wanted to give an example about how we could become acquainted with the Imams [p] and their [spiritual] stations, I would say that we must look at 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī, for he is a mirror from which we can learn the status of the Imams [p]. 'Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā'ī was a man who lives and will never die. The Quran describes the Prophet as:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَى خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ.

And truly thou art of an exalted character. [68:4]

The soul of the Prophet [p] is greater than that of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī thousands of times over. In fact, there is no comparison between the two. Yet, people would come to the Prophet [p] and abuse him, and they would try to force their opinions on him. Conversely, Salmān and Imam Ali [p] were not like this. Imam Ali [p] would say that he is a servant of the Prophet [p], and that he would sacrifice his life for him. If the Prophet [p] commanded him to do something, he would obey, even if doing so meant he would be torn to pieces. He would obey the Prophet's [p] every command, regardless of how small or great it was. This is why he reached those high spiritual ranks and stations. Nahj al-Balāghah is a book by Imam Ali [p]; where is the Nahj al-Balāghah of Omar or Abu Bakr or Uthman? They ruled longer than Imam Ali did. Imam Ali [p] only governed for five years, and the sermons in his book were collected during this short period of governance. During the twenty-five years in which the Imam [p] was isolated in his home and worked as a gardener and farmer, he did not get involved in the political system. So where are the sermons and words of Omar?

The sermons of Imam Ali contain within them worlds of wisdom and knowledge. They speak of diving into the depths of gnosis and discovering its truth and reality. It is as though he [p] entered the sanctuary of God and began speaking about its highest realms including the Throne (*ʿarsh*), Chair (*kursī*), the

Lordly realm (*ʿālam ʾal-rubūbī*), etc. If he were to be asked, “Where did all this come from,” he would reply:

انا عَبْدٌ مِنْ عَبِيدِ مُحَمَّد.

I am but a servant of Muhammad’s servants.[38]

These words mean that Ali [p] is a servant in the sense that if the Prophet [p] were to order him to do something, he would obey him without hesitation. He would not tell the Prophet [p] that he was tired and to assign the task to someone else. During the Battle of Badr, when the night was dark, the time late, and the area occupied by the enemies, the Muslim army had run out of water. The Prophet [p] gave a waterskin to Saʿd b. ʾAbī Waqqāṣ and ordered him to go to a specific location and fill it with water. Saʿd was unable to do this task, so the Prophet asked others to do it. They, too, refused. Only Imam Ali [p] took the waterskin and filled it with water.

Chapter 5

A Number of Important Fundamentals in Spiritual Wayfaring

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ علىٰ محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطّيّبينَ الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ علىٰ أعدائهم أجمَعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

Masters of the path regard a number of necessary principles as necessary for journeying towards God.

1. Silence

One such principle is silence. *Al-Majlisī* quotes a long narration from the book *"Irshād ʾal-Qulūb,"* by *ʾal-Daylamī*, known as *The Narration of the Ascent* (*ʾal-riwāya ʾal-Miʿrājiyya*). It can be found in the seventeenth volume of *Biḥār ʾal ʾAnwār*. This narration begins, "O Ahmad!" Only God knows what secrets and mysteries this narration contains regarding silence.

يا أحمد! [يا أحمد!] عليك بالصمت فانّ أعمر القلوب قلوب الصالحين والصامتين، وإن أخرب القلوب قلوب المتكلمين بما لا يعنيهم. يا أحمد إنّ العبادة عشرة أجزاء تسعة منها طلب الحلال، فإذا طيّبت مطعمك ومشربك فأنت في حفظي وكنفي، قال: يا ربّ ما أوّل العبادة؟ قال: أوّل العبادة الصمت والصوم.

"O Ahmad! Observe silence, for the most flourished of hearts are the hearts of the righteous and the quiet. And the most destructed hearts are of those who speak about that which does not concern them. O Ahmad! Faith has ten parts, nine of which are in seeking halal provisions." The Prophet then asked, "O Lord! What is the foundation of worship?" The Lord replied, "Silence and fasting."

There is another narration related from the Prophet [p] in which he says:

لوْلا تَمْريجٌ في قُلوبِكُمْ وتَكْثيرٌ في كَلامِكُمْ لرَأيْتُمْ ما أرَى ولَسَمِعْتُمْ ما أسْمَع.

"Were it not for the loquacity of your sayings and the temptations and anxiety in your hearts, you would indeed see what I see and hear what I hear."[39]

This saying means that, were it not for the disturbances, disarray, changes, and instability in one's hearts, and were it not for their excessive speaking, one would see and hear what the Prophet [p] could see and hear. In another narration, the Prophet [p] says:

لوْلا أنَّ الشَيَاطِينَ يَحومونَ حَولَ قُلوبِ بَني آدَمَ لرَأوْا مَلَكوتَ السَماواتِ والأرْض.

"Were it not for demons circumambulating the hearts of the sons of Adam, they would witness the Kingdom (malakūt) of the Heavens and the Earth."[40]

The relationship between speech and the heart

There is a correlation between speaking too much and the state of one's heart. Speech has an existential effect on the soul, and

it stems from the individual's self (*nafs*) and will (*ìrāda*). The soul first sees something, and so it creates a conceptualization/ideation of that thing, which results in the development of an inner desire for that thing. The soul then places this matter before its eyes and conveys it externally to others. This operation occurs via the tongue. Thus, [verbal] speech is not separated from the speech of the heart; it reveals the true nature of the individual's soul and reality. Speaking reveals those who are joyful and those who are wretched, for the thoughts of human beings, their intentions, beliefs, and wills, are all effects of the soul. Speech reveals all these matters and externalizes them, which thus can be considered a lower form of existence than those meanings that exist in the soul. In other words, when the soul wishes to descend and externalize its will, intent, and desires, it does so through speech and words. Thus, the words of every individual are, in fact, representations of themself. They reflect the person's personality and movement.

If someone [e.g., the saints (*ṣiddīqīn*) and those brought near (*muqarrabīn*)], has traversed the spiritual path and reached their desired goal, and if their heart was clean and pure, then their speech would be Truth as such. In this case, whether they speak scarcely or plentifully makes no difference, precisely like the sermons all other speeches Imam Ali [p] would

deliver, for it is all truth, as it did not stem from one's self, but rather from God, and therefore his [p]'s speech is Truth as such.

Silence requires training and practice

One who wishes to traverse this journey must amend their speech. They must weigh their words and observe them closely. For this to happen, the speaker must first examine and observe their heart because of the relationship that exists between one's heart and one's speech. Therefore, one must choose silence so that their heart is not in conflict. It must remain calm and tranquil. When certain thoughts come to mind, one must not allow them to reach the tongue.

For example, if a person becomes angry and has the urge to swear at another, the profanity will come out if the person does not control their tongue. On the other hand, one may be urged to swear at another but choose to control their tongue and prevent this evil from coming out. If this control is repeated a number of times, a habit will eventually develop as well as inner strength which results in the elimination not only of evil speech, but even of the evil impulse from whence it comes. The self of one who repeatedly prevents themself from reacting in a strict and harsh manner will cease tempting them to behave that way. In fact, the mere thought of it will be eliminated. This can only be accomplished through controlling

the tongue, which is considered to be the scale of the heart, as the pathway of the heart is the tongue. Silence and calmness come over the heart when the tongue is silent. However, if the tongue is constantly busy, then the heart will also remain in discord and disruption.

Sayyid al-Qāḍī's exposition on the effect of speech on the heart

The late Sayyid al-Qāḍī, the teacher of ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī' and several other of my teachers, gave a beautiful explanation of why silence is necessary on the wayfaring path: *"When the wayfarer on the path to God chooses silence, this silence allows the sediments of the self (nafs) to settle."* In the past, water was directed to houses through channels, and people would fill their tanks and reservoirs with this water. They would then let it sit for some time so that all the sediments would settle to the bottom. The water would then become clear and potable.

A wayfarer must be calm and silent so that their sediments settle. If the water in the tank or reservoir is constantly moving, the sediments will never settle. Therefore, in order for the sediments in the self to settle, a person must experience calmness, and calmness results from silence. It is silence that calms this water so that the sediments can settle down and eventually harden, by God's Power.

If the sediments settle but do not harden and a person stirs the water with something, the water will again become dirty. However, if the water remains still, the sediments will eventually harden. The rocks which we see as layers in rivers, seas, and mountains were previously mud. When the mud settled and ceased to move, it turned into stable and unmovable rocks. Similarly, when the self (*nafs*) moves, only pure water will move, because Satan has become a rock that cannot move. Satan is like those sediments and dirt that have hardened and cannot move anymore.

This is why the Prophet [p] said:

ما مِنْ آدميٍّ إلا ومَعَهُ شَيْطانٌ

"Every person has a Satan [within him]."

The Prophet [p] was asked, "O Messenger of God! And you also have a Satan?" He [p] replied:

نَعَم، ولَكِنَّ شَيْطاني أسْلَمَ بِيَدي.

"Yes, but I have made my Satan submit with my own hands."[41]

If the Prophet had not possessed a self, he would not have attained those spiritual stations. God, the Most High and Exalted, brought Satan into existence. Satan has a manifestation, which God made, in all selves. Satan also existed

in the Prophet [p], but the Prophet defeated him and made him submissive to his [p] commands. The Prophet [p] had a self which he [p] utilized correctly. However, giving freedom to Satan, granting him control over the self, and submitting one's self to him will undoubtedly destroy the individual.

God's manifestations only occur when the self is tranquil

Based on the aforementioned, one can say that the path of spiritual wayfaring is for the purpose of reaching a state of self-tranquility. The reason being is that the manifestations of God do not occur in the self except when it is tranquil.

God says in the Quran:

ألا بذِكرِ اللهِ تَطمَئِنُّ القُلوبُ

Verily, hearts are at peace in the remembrance of God. [13:28]

Everything in existence tries to draw the individual to itself, thus creating confusion, disorder, and instability. It causes the person's thoughts to become worrisome, stressful, and confused. At times, one's thoughts overcome them and draw one towards them. The heart can be at peace only in the remembrance of God. With such remembrance, the individual buries and forgets all their worries. Thoughts, ideas, and

imaginations will cease to exist. The heart has reached peace in the remembrance of God, and through silence all the dirty sediments of the self become hardened. Thus, silence is one of the principles of spiritual wayfaring.

The levels of silence

The extent to which silence must be observed varies in accordance with the different states a person experiences when traversing spiritual stations and levels. At the onset of spiritual wayfaring, one is told to observe silence by not talking excessively. One must not only avoid backbiting and lying but must also refrain from any regular speech that has no worldly or after worldly benefit. One must keep their mouth closed and not speak much. For example, if a person attends a gathering and spends their whole time speaking, keeping themself distracted and busy, then they should ask themself whether what they were saying during this gathering had any spiritual benefit, whether it was for the world or the afterworld, or whether it assisted in purifying their soul or not. One must not attend gatherings in which one's time is wasted, nor should a person say that they need to attend such gatherings and socialize with people in order to relax and feel better. This, in itself, results in bringing darkness into the heart and hardening it. Such gatherings are not necessarily those in which profanity

is uttered and forbidden acts are performed. Rather, gatherings with permissible (*mubāḥ*) albeit useless matters must also be avoided. One must hold the key to their heart in their hand and contemplate their words before speaking, evaluating the nature of what they want to say to see whether it has any benefit or not. The evaluation must occur prior to the speech, not after. Imam Ali [p] has a wonderful saying regarding this:

لِسانُ العاقِلِ وَراءَ قَلبِهِ وَقَلبُ الأحمَقِ وَراءَ لِسانِهِ

"The speech of a person of intellect follows their heart, while the heart of the fool follows their speech."[42]

A person of intellect contemplates and thinks about what they want to say before speaking. This naturally results in the speaker avoiding mistakes. The fool, on the other hand, speaks first and then evaluates whether what they said was correct.

Silence comprises both speaking and listening

A wayfarer must have complete control over their speech. Whenever a wayfarer wants to say something, they must analyze it and determine whether it is or is not correct and beneficial. This principle applies to both speech and gossip (*masmūʿāt*), as whatever a person listens to also creates an impression on the heart. Therefore, a person must also not

allow themself to listen to everything. They must choose to listen to what is beneficial.

When describing the God-wary people (*muttaqīn*) in Nahj al-Balāghah, Imam Ali [p] says:

وَقفوا أسماعَهم على العِلم النافع لهم.

"They restricted their hearing to knowledge that benefits them."

Knowledge is ample in this world, and the news is never-ending. A person must search and select only those which are beneficial to them.

Therefore, gatherings, events, lectures, exhibits, etc. all fall under the category of *masmū ʿāt*, and thus, a person must think of themself in such settings and be selective in what they choose for themself. The criterion for selection is not always whether they are matters of truth or not, but whether they are beneficial or not. For example, if one spends the night observing the stars and planets attempting to figure out the distance between Uranus and Neptune, they would not have benefited themself in any way, even though what they discover is something true and correct. A night in one's life would have been wasted on a matter that the angels Nakir and Munkar would not inquire. The questions they will ask will be related to

God and the extent to which a person came to know Him. Thus, a person must not speak too much and must not listen to a lot of various matters that do not benefit them.

Examples of excessive and non-excessive speech

Speaking to one's wife and children does not fall under the category of excessive speech. On the contrary, it is necessary for both sides to converse freely without being strict in this regard. Undoubtedly, there is a limit in this case as well, for a person must not speak about absolutely everything. The same applies to a shopkeeper when a person goes to purchase something. It is necessary to speak with them, but if the conversation begins to stretch and transforms into one about the weather or any other non-beneficial matter, then one must kindly excuse themself and leave. This also applies to someone who goes to the mosque. If someone approaches and greets you while you are sitting down, then greet them back. This much is sufficient. Many such people are worldly in nature and do not have a heavenly soul. Their thoughts are filled with worldly matters and as soon as they sit next to someone, they begin to speak about worldly matters. This internal disruption and chaos are not just confined to themselves; they will also transfer to those surrounding them. This transference occurs through their tongues. In fact, this internal disruption is transferred even in their greetings and inquiries about another person's health and such. Therefore, a person must be wary about this, especially

with those who have stiff hearts and hefty souls, for they exhaust and harm the wayfarer. Sometimes, when a person speaks with someone else for a few minutes, they begin to feel as though a mountain has been placed on top of their shoulders. Conversely, when someone speaks with a person who has a tranquil and pure soul, they will not tire, even if that person speaks for hours.

In summary, silence means that one must not speak, and at this [initiatory] level, one must limit themself to what is necessary, such as the recitation of the Quran, supplications, *ziyāra*, prayer, enjoining good and forbidding evil, spending time with the family, and conversing at work. There is no problem with speaking in these circumstances to the extent which is necessary, and nothing more. For example, a person working as a doctor in a hospital must limit their speech to that which is necessary to perform the job. The doctor should neither repeat themself when it is not necessary, nor engage in conversations which are not beneficial to them. One must not reveal one's own [spiritual] secrets and statuses to anyone else but must remain within their own scope. A person must place a lock on their mouth and not allow it to surpass or transgress the heart. Controlling one's tongue is a difficult and strenuous matter. It has been mentioned that some wayfarers of the past used to place rocks in their mouths so as not to speak heedlessly. This would allow them to evaluate what they wanted to say, and if

they deemed their speech to be beneficial, they would remove the rocks from their mouths, speak, and then place them in their mouths again when their speaking was done.

There will be difficulties at this stage because the individual is habituated to speaking without limitations. It is necessary for a person at this level to struggle and work hard by observing their "self" in order to achieve their goal and pass this stage.

2. Health and nutrition

Taking care of one's health and nutrition is the second principle. One must only eat food which brings one benefit. People usually eat any type of food without paying attention to its nutritional value, properties, benefits, effects, etc. People who eat nuts, seeds, and the like do not usually look into their specific nutritional values. If these foods are eaten for pleasure, then they must be avoided.

One must eat food that benefits one's health so that the body does not weaken and become malnourished. Malnourishment of the body renders the soul incapable of performing its duties. The late Sayyid Jamāl ʾal-Dīn Afghānī, who has been mentioned multiple times in the volumes of *Life After Death* (*Maʿrifat ʾal-Maʿād*), strongly emphasized that we must balance our temperament. He told us that if a person embarks upon a [spiritual] journey and performs spiritual exercises

before their temperament is balanced, their physical body will become frail, and the person will remain a slave to their body for the rest of their life. The body is a vehicle, and its purpose is to make the person reach their destination. If it is unable to fulfill this purpose, it becomes frail, and the person's soul falls into its service.

Both the temperament and the mood of the individual are very important. Therefore, one must not overeat to the point that their thinking becomes impaired, or they cease to function and work properly. At the same time, one must not eat too little; otherwise, they will not have enough strength to work.

Scheduling meals is also necessary. One must not eat before feeling hungry and must stop eating before feeling full. One must choose what is beneficial for the body, regardless of what it is. If eating kebab is beneficial for them, then they must eat it. The criterion in eating food in this case is spiritual wayfaring, not asceticism or anything of that sort.

Asceticism (*zuhd*) means "*the movement which brings proximity to God*." Therefore, if a person who wants to move towards God is told at the onset of their movement, "*You must strengthen your temperament*," then they must obey. Otherwise, the person will remain stagnant in their place. If they must eat kebab to move, then they must do so, and this is not contrary to asceticism. In fact, it *is* asceticism. If one does not

eat and puts pressure on the self, or if one does not pay enough attention to their temperament, one will remain behind and miss the train.

One must contemplate and think about the properties of the food they eat and act in accordance with the instructions that are given them. For example, one must wash their hands before and after eating, begin and end with salt, begin with "*In the name of God*" (*bismillāh*) and end with "*Praise be to God*" (*alḥamdulillā*). One must chew their food very well, crave what they eat, and select foods which are healthy and beneficial for the body. Therefore, from the viewpoint of spiritual wayfaring, one's temperament and state of mind must not be impaired or deficient; otherwise, it will hinder the person's movement.

3. Seclusion

Another essential principle in spiritual wayfaring is isolation and seclusion of oneself from environments which cause stress, worry, disruption, and instability. When a person is surrounded by instability and disarray, then mixing with poisonous people, behavior, and speech will affect and destroy the individual's soul. Souls are like "communicating vessels." If liquid is added to one vessel, it will equal and balance out in all other vessels that are connected to each other. The same happens to the souls of human beings. When two souls connect to one another, then, just as with the vessels, whatever is in one soul will go into the

other. Thus, if the soul is heavenly, it will make the lower vessel heavenly and elevate it to an equal level. However, if a soul is polluted, it will pollute the lower vessel and change its color. Thus, people should avoid sitting and socializing with evil and worldly people who have no care or concern for anything except the world. They will attract and draw their heart towards themselves.

مَنْ أصْبَحَ وَأكْبَرُ هَمِّهِ الدُّنيا فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللهِ فِي شَيْءٍ

"He whose major concern when waking up is the world, has nothing to do with God."

People, even if they are good, pray, and perform all their religious duties, can be categorized into two. The first category comprises those who perform their prayers and fast, but their main concern and objective is the world. They are not prepared to give up the world for God. If a worldly interest conflicts with God's command, they choose the former over the latter. Socializing and associating with these people is harmful to the individual. Like the aforementioned vessel, they draw the souls and hearts of other individuals to their level and way of existence. They also draw them to their thoughts. One who invites, greets, or replies to the greetings of another, or one who enjoys time spent with another will be attracted towards

that person, regardless of whether the other person's soul is good or bad, ugly, or beautiful.

The wayfarer must always remain aware so as not to fall prey to the wolves. They must open the door of Mercy to themself and constantly associate with heavenly and spiritual souls. They must associate themself with people like Imam Ali [p], Maytham, and all the other pure and beautiful souls. One must not walk on the deviant paths. This is all in one's own hands.

As I have previously mentioned, a servant must become unconscious, and even though this is an involuntary matter, a person can cause it to happen. For example, if a person is sent to be given anesthetics and is told to enter the designated room, they must accept. They will also be told not to eat the whole night before and that their blood pressure will need to be taken in the morning. The person will then be asked to sleep on a bed, be made to wear a face mask and told to take a deep breath. The person must not object to any of these steps but allow everything necessary to be done. When the person becomes unconscious, whatever procedure must be done will be performed. Even though the person has no control over what is done when they are unconscious, they can deliberately choose to become unconscious by performing all the preliminary steps, such as lying down on the hospital bed,

wearing the face mask, taking a deep breath, etc. They must do this joyfully and not stressfully, because it is all mercy and joy for them. The Beloved is calling the person to Him, and the person must answer His call. After that, the person will reach a very blissful state.

The people of the world draw the human being towards the world

In summary, one must avoid those who are worldly and whose objectives are worldly, regardless of who they may be. A person whose objective is the world, regardless of their shape or form or what garment they put on, will draw other human beings to the world. Everything other than God is worldly. An individual must behave like someone who is experiencing pain and is searching for a cure. An individual must think about how to avoid becoming bait for others. Associating with such people turns the individual into bait. Thus, one must protect oneself, especially if the other person has a strong soul. The strength of the soul varies from one person to another. Some are like magnets that attract others very quickly, especially if they have a delicate (*laṭīf*) soul. People who have a delicate soul are quickly caught and reeled in without noticing. Therefore, a person must be very wary in these situations.

How to select a friend and associate

A person must think to themself, "*Can this person play any role in the perfection of my spiritual state? Does this person draw me closer to God? Does this person draw me closer to the Truth? Does this person bring me closer to the sharīʿa? Will this person draw me to falsehood, delusions, and the conceptual realm (ʿālam ʾal-khayāl)?*"

سودائیان عالم پندار را بگو
سرمایه کم کنند که سود وزیان یکیست

Say to the one whose temperament has turned black due to visitations to the conceptual realm!
Withdraw your capital from it, for profit and loss there are one.

The meaning of seclusion

The wayfarer enters seclusion whenever they sever their connections with evil people and those who are not from the people of God. Thus, seclusion means to isolate and keep away from evil and polluted souls. It does not mean to live atop a mountain or in a cave or to close the door of one's home. It is the seclusion of the soul and the distancing from bacteria and polluted atmospheres. It is to stay away from polluted thoughts which are contagious and are passed onto whoever enters the environment in which they are present. It means that a person must protect and shield themself; only then can they begin to perform their duties.

Associating with the righteous (*ṣulaḥā*) and friends of God (*ʾawliyāʾ ʾAllā*) is important for the wayfarer

Association with the righteous friends of God, those whose pain and thoughts are God, those who think about and remember Him with sincerity, is a necessary and good association. It provides the wayfarer with energy and strengthens them. The wayfarer needs a companion and cannot make the journey alone. They need a companion during times of difficulty and fatigue. They would both meet to recite the Quran, discuss poetry or Nahj al-Balāghah, converse about divine gnosis or the lives of the mystics (*ʿurafā*), noble ones (*ʿuẓamā*), the people of certitude (*ahl al-yaqīn*), and the saints (*ṣiddīqīn*). This provides them both with energy.

A wayfarer will become fatigued if they do not have a companion. It is possible for a person to travel through a desert, but having an affable companion will make traveling long distances much easier. Crossing a desert alone is possible, but it comes with much difficulty.

Therefore, one of the instructions on the path of wayfaring is to avoid people who bring one no benefit, pollute their environment, and conversing with whom will bring [inner]

disruption to the individual. These are people who criticize a lot and try pushing a person to become worldlier by giving bad advice. They are people who tend only towards imagination. They have descended from the realm of unity and divine light and have become trapped in this place.

When a person sees themself traversing the path of God and working for God, then they must not pay attention to such individuals, i.e., one must not speak with such people so as to prevent these individuals from instilling anything in the individual. Choosing silence in these situations prevents these individuals from leaving an impression on the individual.

Therefore, the first principle is silence. The second is observing one's food intake, and the third is seclusion. Seclusion is to fulfill one's needs, think about one's self, and remove oneself from the disruptions, disarrays, and movements which cause the water to become murky. One must not look at scenes or listen to words that have this effect. Reading a book which causes internal disruption is also harmful. Imam Ali [p] says:

وَقفوا أسْماعَهَم عَلى العِلم النافِع لهُم.

"They restricted their hearing to knowledge that benefits them."

Suppose that there is a book which contains many facts and truisms, but when you read it, you find an internal sense of

disruption and mental distractions. This is not good. The wayfarer must read books which bring peace and tranquility to the soul and thus revive it.

4. Morning wakefulness (*saḥar*)

Another principle is morning wakefulness (*saḥar*). A person must awaken a few minutes prior to the morning (*sobḥ*) call to prayer so that they are not asleep between the morning call to prayer and the two rises[43] (*ṭulūʿayn*). Sleeping between the morning call to prayer and sunrise is detested. One must recite the Quran and invocations, and what else one must do in this regard will be discussed later. Such acts must be done except when a person has justification or their state does not permit it, or when they are tired or sick, fatigued, or could not sleep the previous night, or if they, in general, had any reasonable excuse. Waking at the end of the night and between the two rises is an essential matter.

5. The constant remembrance of God

Another essential principle is for the person's thoughts to be directed always towards God. God must be the individual's object of persistent search (*ḍālla*). In all acts of life, the goal must always be God and the search for Him.

The recording device used to record these lectures was placed here for the sake of God. Even though it is a person who performed this action, the goal, it is God, and He is sought and discovered through it. When a doctor goes to work to check up on their patients, they will also find God there, for one is in a constant search of Him. In this case, God comes to the doctor through the path of the patient. The patient is a means and a way to reach Him. The doctor is not dealing with the patient, but rather with God. When you speak to your coworker, you are dealing with God, and when you speak with the accountant, you are also dealing with God, and so is the case when you are dealing with your employees. These are all different forms and webs that connect with God. Your object of persistent search is God Who is within them. The goal of dealing with everyone is finding God.

This is why we find the person whose heart burns in longing for God associating with all these people, but the flame remains in the person's heart, for the people do not satisfy them. Every act one performs has its own manifestation and flame. The wayfarer has a continuous desire to discover what the next Divine manifestation is. They want to take another step after completing the first, and then continue to take the third and fourth steps, and so on. This prayer is the first step, the second is fasting, the third is spending time with the family, and the fourth is fulfilling the needs of the physical body. These are all

steps towards the goal, and God is found within them all. "God is above everything" (*'Allahū fawqa kullu shay*).

The meaning of continuous remembrance (*dhikr*) and its importance

Continuous remembrance is another instruction. This means that the wayfarer's *dhikr* must always be God. So long as we have not reached God or the station of proximity (*maqām 'al-qurb*) or any station (*manzila*) for that matter, then the heart must remain broken. The wayfarer must remain heartbroken until the gate is opened for them. If the wayfarer is not heartbroken, they will remain like everyone else. Being heartbroken is what moves the person towards God. It is the faculty of motion and energy which emerges from God and shines into the heart of the wayfarer. The individual sees themself as completely helpless with no one in the entire world to assist them except God, no one to answer their call except God. It is at that time that one asks for and seeks God. God, however, does not take a person in immediately. Rather, one must first transcend the self and move. It must be done step by step. God is capable of helping the individual [reach the goal] in an instant, but He chooses not to because He wants to perfect the person.

If Divine light comes instantaneously, it will burn and incinerate the wayfarer. God, however, is Merciful, and moves the wayfarer step by step and stage by stage, until the wayfarer reaches the destination. If an individual moves in this manner, they will not suffer from physical ailments, become insane, get lost in the desert, or leave home and live outside of it. Rather, the individual will move step by step until they reach the sanctuary of God.

This is a complete guideline which the Quran and the Messenger [of God] brought for us. Even though human beings live in the conditions of multiplicity (*al-kathra*), one is still able, through this faculty of motion, which is located in the heart, to traverse these stages towards God in a good manner.

The story of the lumberjack who requested pure love from God

The late ʾAnṣārī narrated the following story: *Prophet Moses once went to Mount Sinai to supplicate and pray. A lumberjack approached him and asked, "O Prophet of God, when you go to pray to God, ask Him to grant me His pure love." He cried to Moses, begged him, and said, "I will become a lover of Him, and I want Him to instill His pure love in my heart at this moment." Moses accepted his request and went off. God told Moses, "We have granted the man what he requested, even though it was not to his benefit." When Moses returned, he saw that the*

man's body had been torn into pieces and was scattered over the desert shrubs.

What does this story mean? It means that the man was granted love. God's love is not like a lantern that has two or four candles. Rather, it is like a torch that has six thousand volts. The person who does not have the capacity to tolerate six thousand volts begins to cry and beg Prophet Moses by saying, *"O Prophet of God, I want everything!"* God is not incapable of granting such, but if He were to answer every request, then it would be as if we want to replace His position. God is merciful and will grant the six thousand volts if we request it. He will make a human being reach the position of being a messenger of God, and will make Imam Ali [p] reach the position of being the commander of the faithful, but it must be done step by step and with insight and knowledge, not in a careless and insane manner, or with instability, chaos, or haste. A person must pass one stage after another, and each of these stages has its own calculations.

One must progress gradually in spiritual wayfaring

Suppose that this servant[44] wants to walk from here to the door of the house, a distance, for example, of approximately one hundred feet. I must first take the first step, then the second, and so on and so forth. Once I move on to the second step, all

traces of the first step will be left behind. For example, if I pass a building by taking the first step, then whatever is now behind me will remain behind me once I move to the second step. Moving from the first step to the third step is also not possible. These steps are called preparatory steps. The one hundred feet cannot be traversed in a single step. After passing each step, the remnants of each step will remain in one's memory, even though one does not see what is behind them anymore because of moving forward. In the second step, one will see visions, but when the person takes the third step, everything in the second step will be left behind and they will see different visions. The same occurs in the fourth step and so on, until the person enters the sanctuary. When one visits the shrine of Lady Zaynab [p], one first stands facing the shrine and then enters, even though it is possible for a person to experience everything related to the visitation in a single step [without the need to perform all the rites and rituals involved]. The same applies to spiritual matters. God is surely capable of perfecting all mankind in an instant, just as if they were to sleep one night and wake up to be someone like Salmān al-Fārsī, but what benefit lies in this?

The importance of remembrance in spiritual wayfaring

God created this world, and He also created Satan. He gave us a soul so that we move towards Him with love and yearning. Had

there not been a responsibility (*taklīf*), there would not have been a Satan, or a soul, or a struggle (*mujāhada*). We would have remained in the realm which precedes this one, i.e., in the eternal garden. The eternal garden is the realm of potentiality that has not yet reached actualization. It is prior to granting the human being the internal flame of yearning, movement, and free will.

Therefore, there is nothing greater for the human being than this faculty of motion, i.e., the remembrance of God that moves a person towards Him. The wayfarer must constantly be in remembrance of God, for this is the lantern that illuminates the heart. So long as the lantern is illuminated, there will be no harm or fear. However, when a person becomes forgetful [of God], then the lantern is switched off, and the person will not know where they are headed. If after that, however, a person cries out to God, He will rush to that person's heart, and there will be no room for fear. Therefore, one of the essential matters is the remembrance of God. His remembrance means calling His Name and constantly remembering/invoking Him.

صمت وجوع وسحر وعزلت وذكرى به دوام
ناتمامان جهان را كند اين پنج تمام

The perfection of the imperfect lies in five:
Eat and sleep only to survive,
Seek solitude from the people, and talk very little,
And be constantly attentive (dhikr) in order to thrive.

The imperfect ones are those who are wayfarers whose journey has not been completed. They are imperfect and want to become ripe fruits. A pear tree first generates buds, then small seedlings, and then it gradually grows. First, it is green, and then it becomes a mix of black and green, and then it becomes brighter and brighter. The same applies to its flavor; at the beginning it will be bitter and strong, but once it grows, its color and flavor will develop until it becomes a pear. Pears are the kings of fruits. They have a sweet flavor and are filled with water, and they are highly demanded and valuable. At this stage, the fruit will not harm the stomach anymore. This is the Perfect Man, i.e., the man who reached perfection.

The five matters which perfect an imperfect person are: controlling one's speech, retreating from the people of the world, morning wakefulness, constant remembrance [of God], and maintaining a balanced temperament in the best manner. A person might see something for which they have no appetite, but God commands that they eat it. Thus, the person must oppose their desire and eat it. This servant has witnessed a number of merchants working in the marketplace during the nights of Nowruz. They were absorbed in their work to the extent of becoming forgetful. For example, the merchant must have lunch at noon, but they forget to do so, and when the night comes, they forget to eat dinner as well. One such merchant was a relative of mine. This young man worked as a

tailor. He remained like this for a few nights in which the zodiac sign of Aries was approaching. He had many customers and so he was always occupied with work. He also had a loan which he wanted to pay off as well as a family to feed. This is why he was very hard on himself. In any case, the tailor was occupied with his work and was seen not sleeping or eating for several nights. Eventually, he suffered a heart attack. It is natural for someone who loves his work to not feel hunger or the need to sleep. However, a heart attack will not take these matters into consideration. If you have a loan, God says that He will help you pay it off, and you must sew shirts to the extent that does not make you suffer a heart attack or from any other illness. Otherwise, all the money that you earn from tailoring will not equal a tenth of the expenses that you will accumulate later.

An important principle in *sulūk*: moderation

A human being will deprive themself of food and sleep while performing any action for which the human being feels love and longing which becomes intense. The individual must be careful and pay close attention to the fact that everything should always remain under their control. God wants this person to move towards Him, and so they must adopt a path of moderation.

خَيْرُ الأمورِ أوسَطها.

Moderation is best in all things.

فإنّ أفضل الأعمال هي التي لا إفراط ولا تفريط، لا سرعة فيها ولا بطء.

The best of acts is that which is neither excessive nor deficient, and that which is neither fast nor slow.

خَيْرُ هذهِ الأمّةِ، النمَطِ الأوسَط.

The best people of this nation are the moderate ones.

Such people are balanced and traverse the path with motivation and free of ailments, pain, or worry. They live long and have good health. The late al-Qāḍī was a walking *watad* (spiritual protector) on earth. He lived for eighty-four years. Ḥajj Hādī ʾal-ʾAbharī, about whom I have narrated a few stories in the book *Life After Death*, was a man of insight. He and this servant [of God] had a bond of brotherhood. He was illiterate, but he lived a long life because of his piety. These are matters which people must work to achieve and to keep under their control by including them in their spiritual and life programs. There is no need to be in a hurry. One must place everything in the hands of God and work in accordance with God's instructions for humankind.

God says in the Quran:

وَاللهُ مِن وَرَائِهِم مُحِيطٌ

And God is behind them, All-Encompassing. [85:20]

این همه الله ِ تو لبّیك ماست

این دعا و سوز و دردت پیك ماست

Your every [utterance of] 'Allah' is God's 'Here I am!' call to you,

Your every need, pain, and [internal] blaze is a messenger from God to you.[45]

If God does not look down on us with His Mercy, we would not be able to utter any of these words, nor would we experience this internal longing and pain in search of God. This is God's eye of love looking at us. Thus, we must not object and say to God, "*Why are You not answering us when we call upon You?*" God will reply, "*I already answered you when you were able to call upon me in the first place. I answered you in your mere ability to pray to me. Now you must prostrate in thanks to Me and say, 'O God, glory be to You. It is with your Beauty, Majesty, and Perfection that you looked at this lowly servant of yours with Your eyes of Mercy. You did so amidst this world which is filled with chaos, thoughts, fears, and false beliefs. These false beliefs make people come into this world blind from the moment of their conception in the wombs of this natural world. They live for*

forty or fifty years and depart blind. Their eyes are closed. So, praise be to God who gave us insight, allowing us to see where to step. We thank You, O God, to the extent of the insight You gave us. We will follow it and ask You for more. Thank you for what You have given me, and I ask from You that which You have not yet given. I ask it from You, because all the potentialities and actualizations are Yours. Our deficiencies and perfections are all from You. These potentialities move step by step until they reach perfection and actualization. Thus, we thank You for this share of insight which You granted us. Alhamdulillah. We ask You, O God, not to take away the blessings with which You previously blessed us. We ask You, O God, to take our hands.'"

قَالَ رَبُّنَا الَّذِي أَعْطَىٰ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلْقَهُ ثُمَّ هَدَىٰ

He said, "Our Lord is He Who gives everything its creation, then guides [it]." [20:50]

Thus, it is God Who created each creature in the best manner, and He did not abandon the creation after that, but rather guided them to their perfection. "*Praise be to You, O God, for encompassing us with your Mercy and guiding us through this manner and these thoughts, and for showing us [righteousness] through this path. Guidance on this path is only possible through You, so take our hands and take us to You, for we are nothing but servants.*"

بنده را پادشاهی نیاید　　از عدم کبریایی نیاید
بندگی را خدایی نیاید　　از گدا جز گدایی نیاید
من گدا، من گدا، من گدایم

The royal garment befits not the slave.
Nor does glory befit the non-being (ʿadam)
Nor does lordship befit servitude.
And the beggar can only beg.
And I am a beggar, I am a beggar, I am a beggar.

بنده ام گر به خویشم بخواند　　رانده ام گر ز پیشم براند
آستانم چو بر در نشاند　　پاسبانم چو بر ره بماند
هر چه گوید جز او را نشایم

I am His slave if He calls upon me,
And an outcast if He then rejects me.
A sill I will be if He so desires.
And as guard I will stand if He wishes
For only that which He calls befits me

گر بخواند به خویشم فقیرم　　ور براند ز پیشم حقیرم
گر بگوید امیرم امیرم　　ور بگوید بمیرم بمیرم
بنده حکم و تسخیر رأیم

If He calls me to Him, I am the one who is needy.
And if He pushes me away, I am the one who is abject.
And if He says that I am a prince, I will surely become a prince.
And if He says: die! I would die and cease to exist.
For I am an obedient servant to Your command, and to Your opinion I am subservient.

از عدم حرف هستی نشاید　　دعوی کبر و مستی نشاید
خاک را جز که پستی نشاید　　از فنا خود پرستی نشاید
من فنا من فنا من فنایم

The speech of "being/existence" befits not the non-being.
Nor does it befit him to claim pride and drunkenness.
Only humility befits "clay."

For the annihilated cannot worship its own self
And I am the annihilated, I am the annihilated, I am the annihilated.

"We are the requesters, and You are the Giver. We are the needy, Lord. We have come to You by Your command, and we have embarked upon the path of servitude. We ask You not to turn away Your Eye of Lordship and Mercy. May this Eye ever persist. Hold unto our hands and guide us to where there is confidence, tranquility, light, and pure mercy." We do not ask God to take away our "worries" specifically, as this is a particular (*juzʾī*) request. For when God's light comes to a person, worry and confusion will have no meaning anymore. Once a candle is lit in a dark room, darkness will have no meaning.

Chapter 6

Constant attention (*Murāqaba*), Purification (*Tazikiya*), and Persistence (*Muwāẓaba*)

أعوذُ بالله مِنَ الشّيطان الرّجيم
بسم الله الرّحمن الرّحيم
و صلّى اللهُ علىٰ محمّدٍ و آلِهِ الطّيّبين الطّاهرين
و لعنةُ اللهِ علىٰ أعدائهم أجمعين

I seek refuge in Allāh from the cursed Satan.
In the Name of Allāh, the All-Beneficent, the Most Merciful
And blessings be upon Muḥammad and his pure family,
And may Allāh's curse be upon all their enemies.

Traversing the path towards God cannot be done by mere talk. It requires application, practice, and action. Every time the wayfarer performs an action, they will succeed and progress to the extent and degree of that action. Conversely, every time the wayfarer abstains from an action, they will retreat to that extent.

When the Messenger of God [p] conquered Mecca, he ascended Mount Safa. All the family members of ʿAbd ʾal-Muṭṭalib surrounded him in a great gathering. They had just been victorious against the disbelievers and the polytheists were expelled from Mecca. They were defeated, cast out, and had become humiliated wanderers. Strength, power, majesty,

and dignity all belonged to the Prophet [p], his companions, and the family of Hāshim and ʿAbd ʾal-Muṭṭalib. The Prophet [p] delivered a short speech which I will summarize in the following. The Prophet [p] addressed the family members of ʿAbd ʾal-Muṭṭalib, admonishing them by saying that even though Islam had been victorious and had earned dignity, and that God had made them victorious and elevated the statement of Truth above all false statements, they should not assume that their responsibilities had ended just because they were related to them. They should also not have assumed that they were free to act and behave in whichever manner they pleased; nor should they have thought that because they were related to the final Prophet, all their actions would be forgiven and overlooked. This is not the case. Every person is responsible for their own actions. The Prophet [p] told them that he, as a Prophet [p], is also responsible for his own actions.

إنّ لي عملي ولكم عملكم.

"I have my actions, and you have yours."[46]

Thus, if I, myself, commit a sin against God, I will plunge and fall into the valley of perdition. Imam Ali [p] counseled his children with the same advice, and so did the other Imams [p]. They counseled and advised their children, relatives, and close companions with these words. Therefore, nearness and lineage

do not, in and of themselves, benefit or play a role in the progression of an individual; such a belief is contrary to what we have received from the perfect divine tradition. Moreover, if this were the case, then God would be an oppressor. God, however, treats all existents equally. Obviously, it is absolutely one hundred percent wrong to think that someone's [spiritual] status will be elevated, or they will be caused to advance and arrive at their destination because of belonging to a certain lineage and without having to work.

The reality of spiritual wayfaring

Spiritual wayfaring must occur through action, and so must traversing the path of God. A wayfarer is one who treads the path with sincerity. The most important thing for a wayfarer is self-control. A wayfarer must, from day one, be diligent and safeguard themself, by God's strength and grace, from all problems and difficulties that they will encounter on this path.

First, is overeating and overindulging in material pleasures. The wayfarers should not eat very much, should not eat until they are full, and should not eat when they are not hungry. Eating meats, eggs, oily foods, and heavy foods is difficult for the stomach and kidneys and too much of them can be harmful.

The late al-Qāḍī often ordered his students not to eat food simply for delight and amusement. He once gave Ayatollah Khūʾī, God's blessing upon him,[47] a spiritual program (as he did for some time) and told him, *"Do not eat food for the sake of delight/amusement (tafakkuh)."* Sayyid Khūʾī thought to himself that at the end of the day, a person must eat. We must, for example, eat rice as well as stew. To avoid eating for delight and amusement, we must then eat rice and stews separately. In this manner, both the body will gain its needed strength and the "eating for delight and amusement" factor would diminish. At the same time, a person must not be excessive in this regard, for the *"best of things is in moderation."*[48]

The *awliyāʾ* advise people to eat meat only two or three times per week. Eating meat more than that fatigues the mind hinders the person's ability to work. When the mind is fatigued, the soul also becomes fatigued, and as a result, the individual will remain stagnant. The sharp sword which must be used for the sake of God will fall to the wayside, rust, and eventually become dull. Eventually, it will become a scrap of iron, rusted and useless.

Secondly, and more important than everything else, is spiritual exercise. The self and soul must both be under the wayfarer's command. The wayfarer must tame the self and

discipline it so that it does not drag them wherever it pleases. The wayfarer must also not indulge in all the pleasures of the self. Gatherings, gossip, and excessive speech are all harmful and drag the individual to the bottom. Moreover, unnecessary traveling and touring also fatigue the individual.

The late al-Qāḍī as well as other great saints would say that travelling is harmful to the wayfarer. One must suffice with only what is minimal and necessary. When a person travels, they lose the tranquility and peace they had gained, whether they like it or not. Furthermore, such a person will not gain anything during their travels, nor will they progress and perfect themself. When the individual returns from their travels, they will have to exert a lot of effort to return to the state which they had lost.

Third is silence and no excessive speaking. One must not engage in non-beneficial conversations. In fact, even refraining from regular conversation is one of the spiritual guidelines for the wayfarer. A wayfarer must not speak. For example, they should not say to themself, *"I will sit down with my friend, and we will both speak about this and that issue. We will speak about the earth, the sky, the east and west, politics, etc., and because we are friends who share the same path, it should not be a problem."* On the contrary, it is very problematic

and harmful. It can cause the wayfarer to stumble without noticing.

Shaykh Behjat and silence

Ayatollah Haj Shaykh Muhammad Taqī Behjat Fūmanī was a student of the late Sayyid al-Qāḍī. During his teenage years, Behjat had a room in the school of *'Al-Sayyed.'* He lived in that school for about seven years. Behjat was occupied with *murāqaba* and silence to the extent that the students at that school would not see him.

Shaykh Abbas Qūchānī narrates the following:

"The Shaykh and I both had rooms in the school of 'Al-Sayyid." When Shaykh Behjat met al-Qāḍī and began receiving spiritual programs and instructions from him, he would cover his head with his cloak whenever he wanted to leave class and return to his room. He did that to avoid having to deal with anyone on the street, and so that no one would occupy his time with conversations or greetings."

People have narrated that the Shaykh's self-observation (*murāqaba*) was so intense that to return to his room, would go leave the school through a tunnel located behind it and then climb a ladder to reach his room which was located on the

upper floor. He would not go to his room through the school so as not to encounter anyone. He did not do this for just a day or two; this was his conduct for the entire seven years. Of course, he gained the benefits of all that.

In the recent past, I met one of the scholars in Tehran with whom I had an old relationship. He was a scholar from Tabriz but lived in Tehran. He had a [governmental] position which carried responsibility. He was also fully aware of my relationship with ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī. Complaining about ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, he once said to me, "*Even though we are from one country, and we both studied in Najaf, ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī and his brother never gave us a chance to build a relationship with them. They always walked with their heads down, gazing at the ground. They looked neither left nor right. If they wanted to go to class, or return from it, or pass through the market, they gazed only at the ground, as if we were not humans.*"

This individual was trying to criticize the ʿAllāmah with these words; however, what did he know about the reasons that prompted the ʿAllāmah and his brother, both of whom were religious sciences students and in their twenties

(ʿAllāmah's brother was five years younger than he), not to speak with others, not to look right or left, even though the self-desires and loves to look around, speak with others, and socialize with them.

The reason is that these two individuals had an internal pain. They realized that their pain could not be cured except through this method. Moreover, they did not disrespect anyone. Every person's respect and dignity have been preserved; but respecting others does not necessitate one to look around, speak or greet others, or attend gatherings or social events which have no benefit.

Silence is one the essential guidelines for this path

Silence is one of the essential guidelines for this path. If the individual does not maintain complete silence, they will lose all their [spiritual] capital and earnings. The soul exerts effort by, for example, reciting dhikr and through worship. For example, when a person stays up all night in worship, they earn something for their soul. If one remains silent, they will preserve what they have earned. Subsequently, these earnings also preserve the soul, which will remain calm and tranquil, and then seek to gain new earnings. If a person does not remain quiet, however, then their entire soul will become unstable, and

all the pollutants and dirt will mix with their soul again, and the pure water of their soul will become once again become murky. The person might not even realize why this is happening. They may think to themself, "*Why am I not advancing and elevating [spiritually]? Why am I not moving towards perfection?*" The reason is that what was gained from the other side is now lost. It is like a water tank that has openings on both sides, one for the water to enter and another from which water exits. Water that is pumped into such tank, even if it is for the duration of one's life, nothing will ever collect in it.

جان همه روز از لگدکوب خیال
وز زیان و سود وز خوف زوال
نی صفا می‌ماندش نی لطف و فر
نی به سوی آسمان راه سفر

The soul is trampled by fancy imaginations every day,
On profit and loss, and the fear of the downfall,
It shall retain neither purity, nor subtlety, nor light.
Nor shall there remain a path for its ascension toward heaven.[49]

Fourth: Presence of heart in the obligatory prayers

Without presence of heart during prayers, one's prayer will not rise beyond the extent of their non-attentiveness. It has been mentioned in a narration that the angels elevate one's prayer based on how much presence of heart that person has had, but they will not elevate the portion of prayer in which there was no presence of heart. When the angels take one's prayer to the

first heaven, they will be told, *"Return this prayer and strike their face with it, for they were not attentive to us during their prayer, and they shared us with other partners during it."* God says, *"I am the Better of Partners, and thus I will give My share to My partner. I have no need for a prayer of this sort."* We see many a person with plenty of work on the outside, but the outcome of their work is very little, because that is what we have mentioned previously about having to observe the aforementioned conditions and principles.

The main condition for the effectiveness of actions

One day, I asked ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī, *"In which circumstance does such-and-such act have the greatest effect? Or how can it be more effective?"* He answered, "Through *murāqaba, murāqaba*!" He then explained what he meant saying:

صمت وجوع وسحر وعزلت وذکری به دوام
ناتمامان جهان را کند این پنج تمام

The perfection of the imperfect lies in five:
Eat and sleep only to survive,
Seek solitude from the people, and talk very little,
And pay constant attention (dhikr), in order to thrive.[50]

In other words, one must observe several matters in order to achieve *murāqaba*. They are:

1) **Silence**.

2) **Hunger**: What is meant by hunger here is the organization of one's meals and avoidance of excessiveness, etc. It also means fasting, which is its most complete form, so long as one does not make up for what they did not eat while breaking their fast (*ʾifṭār*) or preparing to fast (*saḥar*). One must not overfill their stomach and bloat; otherwise, the benefits of fasting will disappear.

3) **Morning wakefulness** (*saḥar*): To wake up at the end of the night. The wayfarer who does not wake up at the end of the night and between the two rises will not reach any station, even if they combat their self for a thousand years. Such a person will not benefit from anything. This is an essential guideline.

4) **Seclusion/isolation** (*ʿuzla*): This means to keep away from worldly people and their desires and opinions. It also means to keep away from those who have no concern other than accumulating wealth, social status, and recognition. Even if these individuals are Muslims and perform their prayers, for they lack the pain of separation from God. Their concerns revolve around their life, their social matters, and other things of this sort. Associating with these people fatigues the

individual and causes one to become lazy and lose their soul.

5) **Constant remembrance** (*dhikr*) [of God]: This means that the human being must always remember God in their heart. They must keep their thoughts always occupied with God and direct themself towards Him. How much of my life has passed? How many hours remain of my life? When will my life end? There have been many people like us who moved, traversed, and arrived. Similarly, there have been many people whose feet got trapped in the mud and they got stuck. They spent their lives with 'I will,' 'I wish,' 'maybe,' until it ended, and they left this world with empty hands.

The importance of *murāqaba*

Murāqaba, which is represented by the aforementioned points, is similar to the preventive measures a doctor gives a patient for treatment. The medications the doctor gives a patient or the surgery a doctor wants to perform all depend on a number of instructions which the patient must follow. For example, the patient must not eat prior to surgery, as it may cause them to choke because of the anesthetics they are given. This is why the doctor asks the patient not to eat prior to surgery. In such a case, the patient cannot drink a cup of water or do something

contrary to the instructions of the doctor and then hope they will not be caught.

The patient is not forced to abstain from these matters. Their hands are not handcuffed. They remain completely free to drink water. However, drinking water may threaten their life, and the patient would be putting themself in danger. Therefore, if the person is confident that the doctor is speaking the truth, that the machines and equipment at the hospital are functioning, and that there are careful and specific procedures and guidelines which the hospital follows correctly, then everyone entering the hospital must abide by these procedures and guidelines for the patient to reach the desired outcome, that is to be treated and cured.

Silence collects and centers the thoughts of the human being. Talking, on the other hand, disperses them. These are two opposing paths. For example, if one wants to head east, then one must choose silence; by not choosing silence, one will head west.

When human beings are silent, their thoughts become centered and focused on the soul. Slowly and gradually, the person's goal and aim begin to be clarified for them after they have been scattered and dispersed. They will unite in their soul when they have been manifolded. The calmness and tranquility in the soul which results from silence will calm all the waves and

storms within the individual. The person will see their soul and that the water in it has calmed, and the sun and moon will clearly reflect in it.

However, if the person does not maintain silence, but looks around at everything and in all directions, opens their mouth to utter anything that comes to their mind, and allowed every sound to enter through their ears, then their mind will remain scattered and dispersed in this world. They will look at God's manifestation in every existence yet be blind and unable to see Him. They will see it but in a broken and blended form:

يَا صَاحِبَيِ السِّجْنِ أَأَرْبَابٌ مُتَفَرِّقُونَ خَيْرٌ أَمِ اللَّهُ الْوَاحِدُ الْقَهَّارُ.

O my fellow prisoners! Are diverse lords better, or God, the One, the Paramount? [12:39]

Such a person will remain living in this state of dispersion for the remainder of their life. They will only satisfy themself with the terms of wayfaring and *ʿirfān*. They will not gain anything and will leave the world while in a sorrowful state, because their soul did not move forward on the path to perfection. Such a person satisfied themself with words instead of action. They were satisfied with listening to the words "honey" and "sweets" and memorizing them instead of eating them. They satisfied themself with taking the doctor's prescription for treatment but

placing it in their pocket instead of going to the hospital to get treated. Such a person will not arrive anywhere. In fact, not only will they not arrive anywhere, but they will also face very dangerous trials and obstacles in their life.

I once contemplated the Quranic verses which speak about punishment, and I questioned whether God, the Glorified and Exalted, would punish this number of people and annihilate them and place them in hell for eternity. I later discovered that the extent to which the Quran has elucidated this matter is, in fact, little compared to the full picture. The prophets, saints, imams, and the Quran have given only remarks about these matters, but the full picture is much greater than what they mentioned. The Messenger of God [p] says:

نَحْنُ مَعاشِرَ الأنبياءِ أمِرْنا أنْ نُكَلِّمَ الناسَ على قَدْرِ عُقولِهم.

"We, the prophets, have been commanded [by God] to speak to people in accordance with the level of their intellects."

In other words, they are commanded to elucidate matters to people according to the people's capacities and levels of understanding, and they cannot say more than that.

A person must journey towards God with all the capacities they encompass and must transform all these capacities into actualizations; that is, one must journey towards God with all their brain cells, body cells, potentials, strengths, and faculties. If a person does not do so but instead decides to abandon all this and end up moving in a different direction, they

will depart from this world in a deficient state. An unripe piece of fruit is picked from a tree with difficulty, and it causes a tear in the tree and damages it, and the fruit itself goes bad as well. An unripe piece of fruit is also not something that is presented to a Sultan. Rather, it is thrown into the orchard to become mulch, or it is fed to the donkeys or mules. A human being transforms into bait for the demons in this world when the human being should be loftier than the angels. There is no graver loss or regret than this, and after death, there will be no return. Satan will then stand and say:

وَقَالَ الشَّيْطَانُ لَمَّا قُضِيَ الأَمْرُ إِنَّ اللهَ وَعَدَكُمْ وَعْدَ الحَقِّ وَوَعَدتُّكُمْ فَأَخْلَفْتُكُمْ وَمَا كَانَ لِيَ عَلَيْكُم مِّن سُلْطَانٍ إِلاَّ أَن دَعَوْتُكُمْ فَاسْتَجَبْتُمْ لِي فَلاَ تَلُومُونِي وَلُومُوا أَنفُسَكُم مَّا أَنَا بِمُصْرِخِكُمْ وَمَا أَنتُمْ بِمُصْرِخِيَّ إِنِّي كَفَرْتُ بِمَا أَشْرَكْتُمُونِ مِن قَبْلُ إِنَّ الظَّالِمِينَ لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ.

And Satan will say, when the matter has been decreed, "Verily God made you the Promise of truth; and I made you a promise, but I failed you. And I had no authority over you, save that I called you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me but blame yourselves. I cannot respond to your cries for help; nor can you respond to my cries for help. Truly I disbelieved in your ascribing me as partner aforetime. As for the wrongdoers, surely theirs shall be a painful punishment." [14:22]

Satan will say, *"I did not force anyone to do anything. Rather, I only called people, so why did they answer me instead of God? I cannot assist or save you, nor can you assist me. We are both in trouble. I am in trouble with my own self, and you are in trouble with yours. Therefore, do not resort to me under the pretense of*

me tricking you in the world and enticing you. Do not ask me to carry your burden or to remove the responsibility from your shoulders."

The believer must maintain absolute silence rather than say anything that could be harmful. The exceptions to remaining silent are matters such as enjoining good, forbidding evil, the remembrance of God, and study sessions (*mubāḥatha*) as long as they are done for God and with God, i.e., they must be devoid of arguments and hypocrisy. One must only have study sessions if they assist in reaching the truth. A person must be dignified (*waqūr*).

The importance of the *riwāya* of *'Unwān al-Baṣrī* in spiritual wayfaring

The late al-Qāḍī would instruct his students to write the narration of 'Unwān al-Baṣrī and always carry it with them in their pockets. They were also instructed to read it once or twice a week.

This servant had asked a few of the friends [of the path] (*rufaqā'*) to write it and carry it with them in their pockets. If they knew Arabic, they were to write it in Arabic; otherwise,

they were to write its translation in a small booklet and carry it in their pocket to read once or twice a week.

When I went to Najaf, the order was given to act in accordance with the narration of 'Unwān al-Baṣrī (that one must carry it with them in their pocket). I had a small pocket-sized booklet those days, and I remember that I did own a copy of *Biḥār 'al-'Anwār* from which to copy the narration. Therefore, I went to the *ḥusayniyya* of the family of *Shushtar* who had a well-known public library in Najaf. I took the first volume of *Biḥār 'al-'Anwār* from the administrator of the library and found the narration and copied it. Among the pocket-sized books that I still have, there is a small booklet left over from those days, and the narration is written at the beginning of it.

The point of the matter is that the individual must strive and care about matters. Following up is also necessary; otherwise, a person will not reach anywhere. The human being works a lot and becomes tired, but there are conditions for achieving results. In order for a light to turn on, a chain of means must be made available, such as there being an electric power plant, electric wires, transformers, etc. These must all exist for us to receive electricity. However, if all these means are there, yet we do not connect the wire we are holding to the

outlet, then all our efforts will go to waste. We must keep this matter in mind as well.

Loss is the consequence of failing to act

We witness t from among the students of the late al-Qāḍī, those who cared and followed the instructions are they who earned and profited. Those who did not earn nothing. We cannot say that everyone who encountered the late al-Qāḍī gained prosperity. Some of them returned to Iran and moved to different cities, and they became imams of *jamā'a* while others became politicians. They chased after gaining representation (*wikāla*) and being selected as governmental representatives during those days and other such matters. This was all done under the pretext of serving Islam. The late al-Qāḍī was informed about their actions, and he was not pleased with them.

One student of al-Qāḍī went to Azerbaijan. A year later, a person from Azerbaijan visited Sayyid al-Qāḍī, who inquired about his student. The visitor replied, "*Praise be to God, he walked on a certain path and became notable, and people love him.*" Al-Qāḍī felt dismay upon hearing this. He said, "*Having fame and being known among the people is a great calamity!*" In other words, when a person becomes known to the people,

others begin to seek them, and every individual will have a request, usually one that revolves around their livelihood, bread, water, meat, etc. However, this prior student is not perfect and has not reached the "utmost boundary" (*sidrat al-muntaha*). He is still drowned in and occupied with the multiplicities of this world and thus will lose his soul. He will spend the rest of his life occupied with the requests of various people. People will constantly greet him, praise him, and kiss his hands and feet. One who avoids fame will at least be able to gather their soul and faculties and contemplate their compositions, while observing silence, as previously discussed. This will allow him to eventually reach a higher station and rank.

Mīrzā Ḥasan al-Nūrī once informed me that he was in the presence of Ayatollah Borūjerdī who told him, *"O Mīrzā Ḥasan, when I was in Borujerd, I was for myself, but when I came to Qom, I ceased to own myself. I became [owned] by the people."*

In any case, the late al-Qāḍī trained many students who were well-mannered, honorable, patient, thankful, and just. Hajj Sayyid ʿAbd al-Hādī Shīrāzī, who was a prominent and very pious *marjiʿ* in Najaf, considered each student of the late al-Qāḍī equal to two individuals/witnesses. In other words, if a student

of the late al-Qāḍī came to him to testify regarding a matter of dispute, Hajj Sayyid ʿAbd al-Hādī Shīrāzī would regard the student's testimony as a complete one without the need to bring two just witnesses.

On many occasions, we have heard that each student of the late al-Qāḍī was considered equal to two individuals/witnesses. The reason for this is that they were all diligent, observant of their actions, and studious. All of them were students of religious sciences and had reached high ranks of knowledge. They were all just and were all people of *murāqaba*. They were so observant that they would not even go to the shores of Kufa to swim. Even though swimming is not forbidden, the wayfarer who suffers from a thousand illnesses and pains has no time to go to the shore and swim; nor do they have the time or the heart to carry the samovar and meals on their back across the river to the other shore so as to sit down and enjoy their time, spend the day from morning to night, and then return to class the next day. While these are outings that are not sinful, no one is speaking of sin here. These wayfarers had no time for outings because they spent their time in study, research, self-observation, prayer during the night at Masjid al-Kufa and Masjid al-Sahla, and thus their time would become limited.

Al-Qāḍī himself had four wives living in four separate homes, as each wife had a home for herself. Despite this, al-Qāḍī, owned nothing himself and would spend many nights alone in a small room in al-Kufa mosque. His eminence was about eighty years old at that time, and he passed away when he was eighty-one. He constantly occupied himself with worship and prayer in the al-Kufa or al-Sahla Mosque, both of which are located in the middle of a desert. Al-Qāḍī stayed alone in a mosque that had no light and no one else present. Not a single other person would be present in the mosque during most of those nights.

The necessity of seclusion and isolation

The Prophet of the end of times (*ākhir al-zamān*) would walk alone to Mecca and climb the mountain to reach the cave of Hira. He would remain there for a day or two, or a week or two, and sometimes for a whole month. Lady Khadija would at times climb that difficult path and take him food. Why was all this done?

A person must contemplate and think about this and wonder, is there really a path that leads to the destination, or was all this done for relaxation and as a meditation on the

surrounding nature? Undoubtedly it was not the latter. It was an escape from the congestion and commotion. It was done to flee from the sounds of the demons of this world and to enjoy silence and the concentration of soul.

Even though he was a prophet and the seal of all prophets, and even though all perfections and attributes were present in him, the Prophet of Islam still performed these actions. His prophecy did not exist from pre-eternity for him to have already possessed all these levels of spiritual ascension, and for God to then tell him, in an artificial fashion, to perform these actions so that people can learn from which path the mount of Hira can be climbed. All the difficulties that the Prophet undertook and endured were an introduction to reaching the goal. The goal is the result of Divine will, and it is eternal and everlasting. Thus, both prophecy and *walāya* are not outside the scope of the Prophet [p], Imam Ali [p], and the Imams [p]'s free will. All the steps which they took were steps of knowledge, *adab*, and training, and these men must be our teachers and instructors on the path.

The necessity of being cautious

If we, too, act in said manner, we will reach the destination. Calling ourselves wayfarers does not heal our wounds or remove our internal pain [for wanting to reach God]. The

individual must truly submit themself to the station of *walāya*. The soul must truly and genuinely submit. The individual must avoid excessive speech and joking. These matters misguide and ruin the wayfarer. The wayfarer who pulls themself together will reach their destination; otherwise, they will remain stagnant, and their journey will be halted.

One may wonder how those listening to Imam Ali [p], the possessor of the status of *walāya*, could not answer his calls or act in accordance with his teachings and sayings. Imam Ali [p] would tell them, *"You have made my heart bleed,"* meaning, *"Why are you not comprehending what I am saying?"* It is truly baffling why people would not listen to him. He would tell them, *"Whoever works will win and profit, and whoever does not, will not. God does not give anyone special treatment."*

I told some friends that now I have reached sixty-seven years of age and my hair has turned gray, and I have left this world and returned a number of times, because of the severe illnesses from which I have suffered. Now, my life is just a few short days, and I am being considered! God has His own way of doing things. God is calculating my account in such a way that you would not believe! You cannot believe it! Even if I were to tell you, you would not believe my words. When I myself am being considered by God for my good deeds (not the bad ones!) and it is indeed a very difficult matter, how can I carry your

burden [as well], especially when that burden is one of bad deeds and vices?!

How to visit the shrines of the infallible Imams [p] and the holy sanctuaries

One must visit the shrine of the Imam [p] or Mecca on foot or with bare feet. One must not take a cab or spend a lot of money. One must, instead, walk the few steps to the shrine in respect of Imam al-Ridha [p]. One must go and return on foot.

When we first moved to Mashhad and were searching for a house, we decided we needed a house close enough to allow us the honor of going and returning on foot to visit (*ziyāra*) the shrine of the Imam [p] daily. It is good to live near the sacred grave of the Imam [p] and specially to walk to it. It is not good to ride a cab to go and return from the shrine.

One must visit Imam al-Ridha [p] or Imam al-Husayn [p] or Mecca by walking. One's feet should be bare, because there are sacred and holy sites there, and the Imam's grave is nothing less than the Ka'ba. In fact, he is the reality and spirit of the Ka'ba. These matters must be observed by people.

Moreover, one must not busy themself with looking at their surroundings. The students of religious studies must keep their heads down when they are walking, but not to the extent

that will make people call them arrogant and selfish. This is not correct; nor is it correct for someone to pretend. A pretending, artificial wayfarer is of no use at all.

The actions of the wayfarer must be wayfaring

The mere actions of the wayfarer must be wayfaring in and of themselves. The wayfarer must constantly occupy their heart with these matters and with the sought object of desire. They should be so occupied with it that they do not find any time for themself to pretend or pay attention to other things, or to look around, to busy themself with mundane conversations and arguments, or to raise their voice in gatherings, etc.

In principle, a believer must be dignified and venerable. When others look at them, the believer's actions themselves will speak for them:

في المَكارِهِ صَبورٌ

Patient in difficult times.[51]

The wayfarer must be as dignified and patient as possible. To be dignified means to be calm and unshakable. To be patient means not to be shaken by occurrences. Being patient does not mean waiting for delicious food that is being prepared for one to be ready. Patience is not in this sense. It is to be patient

when the food does not arrive, and to be patient with that which is irritating. It is to be patient when someone is insulting. It is to be patient if one does not hear good words from one's father, mother, sister, or friends.

A wayfarer must not consider what they do for their friends in God

The wayfarer must put their friends in God before themself and must not esteem their own altruistic behavior. For example, if someone forgoes their rights and steps down for someone else, they should not think to themself, *"I stepped down and did this and that for this other person."* One must not appreciate any good deed they perform for a friend. In fact, one must consider themself as having shortcomings (*muqaṣṣir*). This causes the wayfarer to move forward and advance. The wayfarer must know that God is the Knower of all secrets and hidden matters and that it is He Who will compensate and reward them for their actions. Thus, the wayfarer's reward will be granted instantaneously. They will enjoy connecting and conversing with God (*munājāt*) at that same moment.

The first instruction of God's saints to their students is *ṣalāt ʾal-layl*

The first instruction al-Qāḍī would give his students was to perform *ṣalāt ʾal-layl* (the prayer of the night) and supererogatory prayers (*nawāfil*). It is not possible to imagine a wayfarer who does not perform *ṣalāt ʾal-layl*, especially a student of religious sciences. One cannot excuse oneself by saying that they have traversed a few stations, that they are occupied with studying and the importance of studying surpasses these matters, or that they were feeling tired that night and thus did not wake up, etc.

Putting spiritual wayfaring aside, we can see that ordinary pious believers never abandoned *ṣalāt ʾal-layl* throughout their entire lives. We witness good people who are not wayfarers and do not feel the internal pain of a wayfarer pray *ṣalāt ʾal-layl*. This is a very important matter. Not praying *ṣalāt ʾal-layl* and spiritual wayfaring do not go hand in hand.

If one truly contemplates this matter, they will see that their time is passing, just like everyone else's. The reason we cannot perform these actions, or that if we do one thing, we cannot do another, is that our schedules are always busy with

other things. Thus, our time is wasted with things like preparing dinner or smoking a hookah. If one abandons these things and abandons unnecessary socializing with others, they will see their time increase.

It is said that the late Shaykh 'Anṣārī cared a lot about his students praying *ṣalāt 'al-layl*. Some of his students would try to justify why they could not pray for it. They would say things like they had to review at night and that praying *ṣalāt 'al-layl* would take away from their study time. They would say that if they prayed *ṣalāt 'al-layl*, they would not be able to study adequately. Shaykh 'Anṣārī would reply by asking the student, *"Do you smoke the hookah?"* The hookah was quite common during those days, and most people would smoke it. Some students would reply, *"Yes I do."* The Shaykh would then ask, *"How long do you smoke it?" "For about fifteen minutes,"* a student would reply. *"How many times do you smoke it per day? Each session would take you no less than fifteen minutes. Consider ṣalāt 'al-layl as one of those times in which you smoke the hookah. All that is expected from you is that you get up and pray ṣalāt 'al-layl for fifteen minutes and then go back to sleep. The person who cares about the hookah will smoke it at least twice or three times a day, even though they have a lot of*

studying to do during the day and night." This person will not arrive anywhere unless they pray *ṣalāt ʾal-layl* in the place of one time smoking the hookah.

The necessity of visiting the graves of God's saints and seeking the saints' intercession

Visitation [of the saints] in a polite manner is advised. A person must also unceasingly seek their intercession (*tawassul*). One must also be very ardent and serious in their actions. Friends must be closely bonded and very compassionate with one another. They must try to resolve each other's problems and put each other first. They should behave in such a manner that if outsiders who have no knowledge of Islam, the Quran, wayfaring, or *ʿirfān* were to observe their behavior and actions, they would comprehend, by witnessing them, that this is the reality and essence of Islam, prophecy, and *walāya*.

Therefore, wayfaring means to follow the straight path of Imam Ali [p]. It should not be something that others, God forbid, witness, and say, "These wayfarers are no different from others. They also argue, create commotion, speak about useless matters, and ridicule others, even more so than everyone else. It is better to stay away from people like this. Spiritual wayfaring is nothing but deception and on the Day of Judgment, its

falsehood will be exposed. At the end of the day, we will find out that there is no truth to it."

If the behavior and action of the individual was truly as just described, then it really is a deception, because God does not reward an individual based on the outward appearance and name of their actions, but rather on the inner reality. Whoever approaches God will reach the destination, and whoever does not, will not.

The Prophet [p] said atop the mount of Safa, *"O family of 'Abd 'al-Muṭṭalib, I have my own actions, and you have yours."* One who comes from a distant city, listens, and obeys will leave and achieve results. They will reach spiritual stations in which they will look into their heart and view the world, spaces, heavens, and the earth from a view of absolute connectedness. The reality of Divine oneness (*tawḥīd*) will be revealed and manifested for them, and the supplications which they used to utter in an artificial manner will be actualized for them, and they will discover their secrets through the light of *tawḥīd*.

Their perfection would be the result of abiding by the path and travelling on it. As for us, we remain in the house, and our hands are still empty. This is a very unfortunate matter, and we will face many great regrets in the future. Every cell in our

body is made for perfection, and so is every cell in our brain, every word we utter, movement we perform, and thought that comes to our minds.

Every cell of our body and every cell of our brain is in the process of perfection. Every word, movement, and thought of ours causes a tissue in our body to burn and disappear, and something has to take its place, and without that, the activity will not take place. All these cells that are burned must be on the way of perfection and the replacement cells must be on the way of life. One sees that he is wasting and burning all these cells, and he himself is caught in the mire and infection of evil thoughts, and God forbid, he is also caught in the devil's trap and thinks that he has traveled the path.

God says in the Quran:

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالا (104) الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعْيُهُمْ فِي الحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا.

Say, “Shall I inform you who are the greatest losers in respect to their deeds? Those whose efforts go astray in the life of this world, while they reckon that they are virtuous in their works.” [18:103-104]

This verse is saying, *“Say, O Prophet, ‘shall I inform you of those whose hands are emptier than everyone else’s? It is they who relied, in all their actions, on these worldly and accidental thoughts and suspicions, and they busied themselves with their personal benefits that have no foundation. They spent their lives*

entrapped in these thoughts and imaginations. They chased after this lowly life. They [falsely] think that their actions are better than others, or that they are at least good actions. These are the people who will profit less than others." These people are those whose efforts and actions have gone astray in this lowly world. They lost themselves here, and so they will not be able to move forward and advance. The door to perfecting their souls will close, and all their efforts will have been wasted in this world. In other words, they have lost the reality of their existence here, because there will be no perfecting oneself in the afterworld. They have been buried in this gravesite.

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Index of ḥadīth

مَنْ اسْتَوَى يَوْمَاهُ فَهُوَ مَغْبُونٌ

He who has two equal days is indeed at a loss.

الْيَوْمُ عَمَلٌ وَلا حِساب وغَداً حِسابٌ ولا عَمَل

Now there is work and no accountability, and later is accountability and no work.

قِيمَةُ كُلِّ امرِئٍ ما يُحْسِنُهُ

The value of every person is equal to that which he capable of doing (yuḥsinuh).

خُلِقْتُم لِلْبَقاءِ لا لِلْفَناءِ

You were created to [eternally] remain, not to perish.

ما لا عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ وَلا أُذُنٌ سَمِعَتْ وَلا خَطَرَ عَلى قَلْبِ بَشَر

What an eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man.

إنّ قوماً عبدوا الله رغبة، فتلك عبادة التجّار، وإنّ قوماً عبدوا الله رهبة، فتلك عبادة العبيد، وإنّ قوماً عبدوا الله شكراً فتلك عبادة الأحرار

People are of three categories: Those who worship God out of desire [for His reward], and this is the worship of the merchants. Then there are those who worship God out of fear [of His

punishment], and this is the worship of the slaves. Then there are those who worship God out of thanks to him, and this is the worship of the free ones.

اللهمّ ارزقني التّجافي عنْ دارِ الغرور، والإنابةَ إلى دارِ الخلود والاستعدادَ للموت قبلَ نُزوله

O Lord! Grant me aversion from the world of deception/delusion and attraction to the everlasting world. And grant me preparation for death before it strikes me.

الحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الّذِي أَحْيانِي بَعْدَ ما أَماتَني وَإِلَيْهِ النُّشور

Praise be to God who granted me life after causing me to die, and to Him is the return.

الحَمْدُ لِلّهِ الّذِي رَدَّ عَلَيَّ روحي لأَحْمِدَهُ وأَعْبُدَه

Praise be to God who restored my soul so that I [can] praise and worship Him.

النّاس ثلاث: عالمٌ ربّاني، ومتعلمٌ على سبيلِ النّجاة، وهَمجٌ رُعاع

People are of three types: (1) one of knowledge who is godly (rabbānī), (2) one who acquires knowledge while walking on the path of salvation, and (3) the confused rabble.

المُؤْمِنُ كالْجَبَلِ الرّاسِخِ، لا تُحَرِّكُهُ العَواصِفُ

A believer is like a firm mountain that storms cannot move.

مَنْ عَرَفَ نَفْسَهُ فَقَدْ عَرَفَ رَبَّه

He who knows himself knows his Lord.

إِنَّ سَعْداً لَغَيورٌ وَأنا أَغْيَرُ مِنْ سَعْد وَاللهُ أَغْيَرُ مِنِّي، وَمِنْ غيرَتِهِ حَرَّمَ الفَواحِشَ ما ظَهَرَ مِنْها وَما بَطَنَ

Saʿd is jealous (ghayūr), and I am more jealous than he, and God is more jealous than I. Because of His jealousy, God has prohibited abomination, both open and secret.

واجْعَلْ قَلْبي بِحُبِّكَ مُتَيَّما

And make my heart enthralled with Your love.

يا عبد العزيز! إنَّ الإيمانَ عَشْرُ دَرَجاتٍ بِمَنزِلَةِ السُلَّمِ، يُصْعَدُ مِنهُ مِرْقاةٌ بَعدَ مِرْقاةٍ

O ʿAbd ʾal-ʿAzīz, certainly faith is ten levels, like the rungs of a ladder, where each rung is climbed one after the other.

اُستُرْ ذَهَبَكَ وذِهابَكَ ومَذْهَبَكَ

Conceal your gold, your excursions, and your creed.

لا يَسَعُني أَرْضي وَلا سَمَائي وَلَكِن يَسَعُني قَلْبُ عَبْدِيَ المُؤْمِن

Neither My Earth nor My Heaven can encompass Me, but that which can is the heart of My believing servant.

اللهُمَّ مَوْلايَ يا مَوْلاي

O Lord, my Master, O my Master!

المرءُ لنفسِهِ ما لمْ يُعرَفْ فإذا عُرِفَ كانَ لغيره

A person belongs to himself so long as he is not known. However, once he is known, he will belong to others.

ما رأيتُ شيئاً إلا ورأيتُ اللهَ قبله وبعدَه ومعه

I saw nothing save that I saw God before it, with it, and after it.

عَبدي أَطِعْني حتّى أَجعلكَ مِثْلِي

My servant, obey me so that I make you like Me.

أَشْهَدُ أَنَّ مُحَمَّداً عَبْدُهُ وَرَسولُهُ

I testify that Muhammad is His servant and messenger.

سَلْمانٌ مِنّا أَهْلَ البَيْتِ

Verily, Salmān is of us, the People of the House ('Ahl 'al-Bayt).

الصَلاةُ قُرْبانُ كلَّ تَقِيَّ

Prayer, for the God-fearing individual, is the means of seeking divine proximity.

أَنا عَبْدٌ مِنْ عَبيدِ مُحَمَّد

I am but a servant of Muhammad's servants.

يا أحمد! [يا أحمد!] عليك بالصمت، فانّ أعمر القلوب قلوب الصالحين والصامتين، وإن أخرب القلوب قلوب المتكلّمين بما لا يعنيهم. يا أحمد إنّ العبادة عشرة أجزاء تسعة منها طلب الحلال، فإذا طيّبت مطعمك ومشربك فأنت في حفظي وكنفي، قال: يا ربّ ما أوّل العبادة؟ قال: أوّل العبادة الصمت والصوم."'

O Ahmad! Observe silence, for the most flourished of hearts are the hearts of the righteous and the quiet. And the most destructed hearts are of those who speak about that which does not concern them. O Ahmad! Faith is ten parts, nine of which are

in seeking halal provisions. The Prophet then asked, "O Lord! What is the foundation of worship?" He replied, "Silence and fasting."

لَوْلا تَمْرِيجٌ في قُلوبِكُمْ وتَكْثِيرٌ في كَلامِكُمْ لَرَأَيْتُمْ ما أرَى ولَسَمِعتُمْ ما أَسْمَعُ

Were it not for loquacity of your sayings and temptations and anxiety in your hearts, you would indeed see what I see and hear what I hear.

لَوْلا أَنَّ الشَّياطِينَ يَحومونَ حَوْلَ قُلوبِ بَني آدَمَ لَرَأَوْا مَلَكوتَ السَّماواتِ والأَرْضِ

Were it not for demons circumambulating the hearts of the sons of Adam, they would witness the Kingdom (malakūt) of the Heavens and the Earth.

لِسانُ العاقِلِ وَراءَ قَلْبِهِ وَقَلْبُ الأَحْمَقِ وَراءَ لِسانِهِ

The speech of a person of intellect follows his heart, while the heart of the fool follows his speech.

وَقَفوا أَسماعَهُم على العِلمِ النافِعِ لهم

They restricted their hearing to knowledge that benefits them.

مَنْ أَصْبَحَ وَأَكْبَرُ هَمِّهِ الدُّنْيا فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللهِ في شَيْءٍ.

He whose major concern when he wakes up is the world has nothing to do with God.

خَيْرُ الأُمورِ أَوْسَطُها

Moderation is best in all things.

فَإِنَّ أَفْضَلَ الأعمال هي التي لا إفراط ولا تفريط، لا سرعة فيها ولا بطء

The best of acts is that which is neither excessive nor deficient, and that which is neither fast nor slow.

خَيْرُ هَذِهِ الأُمَّةِ، النَمَطِ الأَوْسَط

The best people of this nation are the moderate ones.

إِنَّ لي عَمَلي وَلَكُم عَمَلَكُمْ

I have my actions, and you have yours.

نَحْنُ مَعاشِرَ الأَنْبِياءِ أُمِرْنا أَنْ نُكَلِّمَ الناسَ على قَدْرِ عُقولِهِم

We, the prophets, have been commanded [by God] to speak to people in accordance with the level of their intellects.

في المَكارِهِ صَبورٌ

Patient in difficult times.

Endnote

[1] Ḥurr al-ʿĀmilī, *Wasāʾil al-Shīʿa*, 16:94.

[2] Shirazi, Saadi. *The Gulistan of Saadi: In Persian with English Translation*, 18.

[3] A poem attributed to Rūmī.

[4] Āmodī. *Ghurar ʾal-Ḥikam*, 133.

[5] Majlisī. *Biḥār ʾal-ʾAnwār*, 19:265.

[6] Ibn al-Fāriḍ. *The Poem of the Way*, 31.

[7] Ibn Ṭawūs, Raḍī ʾal-Dīn. *Iqbāl al-Aʿmāl*, 228.

Imam al-Sajjad [p] would repeat this supplication in his prostrations.

[8] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī 2:539*.

[9] Ibid, 2:539.

[10] In reference to the verse: "So be patient with beautiful patience" [70:5]. [T]

[11] Tihrani, Muhammad Husayn Husayni. *The Shining Sun*, 20.

[12] Al-Ḥarrānī, Al-Ḥasan. *Tuḥaf al-ʿUqūl*, 169.

[13] Al-Aḥsāʾī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr. *ʿAwālī al-Laʾālī*, 4:102

[14] This can be demonstrated as follows:
The proposition reads:
Subject (A): They forgot God.
Predicate (B): He made them forget their souls.
Contraposition, which involves converting it from '*all* **A** is **B**' to '*all* **not-B** is **not-A**':
'He *did not* make them forget their souls, so they *did not* forget God.'
Finally, if "forgetting" is replaced with "knowing," which is equal to it in meaning, then it will read as follows:
"They knew their souls, so they knew God." [T]

[15] In Islamic mysticism, the notion '*ʿishq majāzī*' (metaphorical love) is juxtaposed with '*ʿishq ḥaqīqī*' (real love). The former refers to any love outside of God which, in truth, is only metaphorical and imagined. True and real love is only that which is experienced with God. [T]

[16] A poem attributed to ʾIbrāhīm ibn ʾAdham. See: Al-Makkī, Abū Ṭālib. *Qūt al-Qulūb*, 2:96.

[17] Tihrani, Muhammad Husayn Husayni. *The Shining Sun*, 196.

[18] Istidrāj (Arabic: الإستدراج, literally: graduality) or gradual destruction, is a divine tradition of indulging sinners in His blessings and their oblivion of asking for His forgiveness before He gradually punishes and destroys them.

[19] A segment of the supplication of Kumayl ibn Ziyād taught to him by Imam Ali (upon whom be peace). See Ibn Abī Ṭālib, 'Alī. *Supplications,* 38.

[20] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī 2:45*; Rayshahri, M Muhammadi. *The Scale of Wisdom*, 105.

[21] Ibid, 105. This is in reference to the remainder of the hadith, "*...The one on the second rung cannot say to the one on the first: 'You are nothing,' until they complete all ten. Therefore, do not knock down one who is below you, lest the one above you knock you down. And when you see one below you in rank, lift them up to your level with gentleness. And do not burden them with that which they cannot bear lest you break them, for verily one who breaks a believer must put them back together again.*"

[22] Majlisī. *Biḥār 'al-'Anwār*, 46:308.

[23] Al-Ṭabarsī. *Makārim al-Akhlāq*, 38.

[24] Rūmī, Jalāl al-Din. *Mathnawī*, 14.

[25] Al-Aḥsā'ī, Ibn Abī Jumhūr. *'Awālī al-La'ālī*, 4:7.

[26] Al-Daylamī, S. A. Ḥ. *Irshād al-Qulūb*, 1:100.

[27] For more on this topic, see: Tihrani, Muhammad Husayn Husayni, *Knowing the Imams,* volume 3, lesson thirty-one.

[28] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muhammad Husayn. Sunan an-Nabi,

In al-Makārim: He said: "When a small child was brought to the Noble
Prophet□ to pray for blessings for the child, he would take the child in
his arms to honor the child's family. Sometimes the child would urinate on him, and some of those who saw this would give a loud cry. He would say: "Do not interrupt the child until they have finished urinating." Then, when he had finished praying for or naming the child and the child's family was happy, he would return the child to the family, and they would see no signs of him being upset by the urine of their child.
When the families had gone, he would wash his clothes."

[29] Majlisī. *Biḥār 'al-'Anwār*, 16:225

[30] Referring to the verses [17:74-75].

[31] Several narrations have been related with this meaning. Some examples include the Prophet [p] saying, "*Who is poorer than I,*" or "*I have become poor, and no one is poorer than me,*" or "*I do not find anyone poorer than me to You* (O Lord!)." These statements have also been related to Prophet Jesus [p], Imam al-Hasan [p], Imam Ali ibn al-Husayn [p], and others. [T]

[32] Majlisī. *Biḥār ʾal-ʾAnwār*, 17:169.

[33] For more examples of Omar challenging the Prophet [p], refer to: Tihrani, Muhammad Husayn Husayni, *Knowing the Imams*, v. 10. [T]

[34] See: *Sīrat al-Ḥalabī*, 2:105 quoted from *Muwwaṭaʾ ʾibn Mālik; Al-Bidāya Walnihāya*, 3:23; *Sahih Muslim*, 2:3; *Musnad Aḥmad*, 3:408.

[35] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 3:265.

[36] Ibid. 3:264: *'Muʿāwiya b. Wahab relates that he asked Abā ʾAbdillā ʾal-Ṣādiq [p] about the most beloved act to God, and the best means of gaining proximity to Him. The Imam [p] said, "I know of nothing, following the knowing of God (maʿrifat ʾAllā), that is greater than this prayer (ṣalāt).*" [T]

[37] 'O you who believe! Enter not the dwellings of the Prophet for a meal without waiting for its time to come, unless leave be granted you. But if you are invited, enter; and when you have eaten, disperse. Linger not, seeking discourse. Truly that would affront the Prophet, and he would shrink from telling you, but God shrinks not from the truth. And when you ask anything of [his wives], ask them from behind a veil. That is purer for your hearts and their hearts. And you should never affront the Messenger of God, nor marry his wives after him. Truly that would be an enormity in the sight of God.' [33:53]

[38] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:89.

[39] Ṭabāṭabāʾī, Muḥammad Ḥusayn. *Kernel of the Kernel*, 25.

[40] Ibid, 26; Majlisī. *Biḥār ʾal-ʾAnwār*, 60:332.

[41] Al-Haythamī, Nur ad-Dīn Ali. *Majmaʿ ʾal-Zawāʾid*, 8:225.

[42] Nahj al-Balāghah, Hikmah 40; Nahj al-Balāghah (Abduh), vol. 2, p. 94:

«و إنّ لسان المؤمن من وراء قلبه، و إنّ قلب المنافق من وراء لسانه؛ لأنّ المؤمن إذا أراد أن يتكلّم بكلام تدبّره فى نفسه، فإن كان خيرًا أبداه، و إن كان شرًّا واراه؛ و إنّ المنافق يتكلّم بما أتى على لسانه، لايدرى ماذا له و ماذا عليه.»

[43] The two rises refer to the rise of fajr and the rise of the sun. *Tr.*
[44] The author is referring to himself. [T]
[45] Rūmī, Jalāl al-Dīn. *Mathnawī Ma'nawī*, v. 3, section 7.
[46] Majlisī. *Biḥār 'al-'Anwār*, 21:111.
[47] This lecture was delivered when Ayatollah Khū'ī was still living.
[48] Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, 1:540.
[49] Ṭabāṭabā'ī, Muhammad Husayn. *Kernel of the Kernel*, p. 16.
[50] Tihrani, Muhammad Husayn Husayni. *The Shining Sun*, 60.
[51] Kulaynī. *Al-Kāfī*, 2:231.